GEMS FROM THE OCEAN OF

TRADITIONAL HINDU THOUGHT

By

Prof. V. Krishnamurthy

2009

CONTENTS

Key to Transliteration of Sanskrit words....4
CHAPTER 1: COUNTLESS NAMES FOR THE NAMELESS....1
1. The First Prostration to The Lord of Lords – VinAyaka 1
2. Lord Subrahmanya....3
3. Idol Worship....5
4. One Truth, Many Expressions....7
5. Glory of the Lord's Name....9
6. Power of Names of God....12
7. Mantra....14
8. Aum, Rama, Krishna, Narayana & Shiva....15
Esoteric significance of AUM....16
'Rama' as taaraka mantra....17
The greatness of the Rudram Chapter....19
9. Litanies of Thousand Names....20
10. Each Name a Capsule of Divinity....22
11. Each Name a Scriptural Epitome....29
12. From the three hundred names of lalitA....38
13. Names from the ashTottara of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba....46
CHAPTER 2: AN INITIAL EXPOSURE TO THE SPIRITUAL ASCENT....53
1. The Animal Passions of Man....53
2. A Six-party Discussion on the Concept of God....58
3. The Three Fundamental Urges of Man....69
4. Detachment, the King-pin Prescription....73
5. Five Cardinal Virtues....78
6. Six Monumental Witnesses....84
7. The Dance Divine....87
The Cosmic Rhythm and the Symbolism of the TANDava....88
The Five SabhAs....90
Evolution of the Chidambaram Temple Complex....90
Miraculous recovery of the Tevaaram Hymns....91
The story of Nandanar....91
8. A Dialogue on Free Will vs. Divine Will....92
CHAPTER 3: MEET THE ANCIENT SCRIPTURES....111
1. Shruti....111
2: SmRti....116
3. ItihAsa....121
4. PurANa....123
Saraswati and Lakshmi....126
One example should suffice....126
Puranic chronologies....128
5. Aagama....129
6. DarSana....130
CHAPTER 4: SUNDARA-KANDA TRIAD – VALMIKI, KAMBAN & TULSI....133

CHAPTER 5: A TOUCH WITH TWO CHAPTERS OF THE GITA....................... 146
1. A Capsule Overview of the Gita 146
2. Yoga SadhanA (From the Sixth Chapter of the Gita)....... 148
3. One in a Million (From the Seventh chapter of the Gita) 152
4.The Magic of MAyA 157
CHAPTER 6: THE ABSOLUTE AS IT IS 161
1. Tip of the Iceberg....... 161
2. Satyam JnAnam anantam Brahma....... 163
3. From the Upanishads 169
4. Difference and Non-difference....... 176
CHAPTER 7: GEMS FROM SHRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM. 180
1. Kapila Gita 180
2. Prahlada Charitam 184
3. Story of JaDabharata....... 196
4. Dhruva-stuti....... 202
5. Raasa Leela of Krishna 216
6. Shruti Gita 226
7. A Devotee calls the Tune 234
CHAPTER 8: SPEAK TO GOD THROUGH PRAYERS....... 237
1. Wonders and Prayers 237
2. Selections from Narayaneeyam....... 241
3. Selections from Soundaryalahari....... 265
4. A Garland of other selections....... 284
CHAPTER 9: THE GURU....... 293
1. Devotion to the Guru 293
2. The Hymn to the Guru of all Gurus....... 298
3. Miraculous Lineage of Mystic Masters 316
Shankara 316
Ramanuja....... 318
JnAneSvar 320
DeSika 321
Madhva....... 324
Appaiya Dikshidar 325
Raghavendra 328
Sai Baba of Shirdi 330
Ramakrishna 332
Aurobindo....... 332
Ramana....... 333
Kanchi Mahaswamigal....... 333
4. Shankara's Message of One-ness 334
5. The Non-absolutist School....... 342
6. Seventy-five Apostles of God-intoxication....... 344
Peria-purANam....... 345
The 63 Nayanmars 346
Appar....... 347
Tiru-jnAna-sambandar 348

Sundarar 349
Manickavachagar 349
Kannappar 351
Tirumoolar 354
The twelve Vaishnava Alvars 356
Nammalwar 356
7. Twelve Gems of Superlative Devotion 357
Namdev 358
Kabir 359
Chaitanya 360
Purandaradasa 361
Eknath 361
Tulsidas 362
Bhattattiri 362
Bhaskararaya 365
The Trinity of Carnatic Music 365
Srila Prabhupada 368
8. From Kanchi Mahaswamigal's Discourses on Advaita SAdhanA 371
9. SadAShiva Brahmendra 379
INDEX 387
Index of Proper Names of Places, Persons & Gods 391

Key to Transliteration of Sanskrit words

Kyoto-Harvard Convention (Modified)

Vowels:		Consonants:					
a	as the 'u' in but	gutturals	*k*	*kh*	*g*	*gh*	*G*
A	as the 'a' in father						
i	as the 'i' in mill	palatals	*c*	*ch*	*j*	*jh*	*jna*
I	as the 'ea' in meal						
u	as the 'u' in put	linguals	*T*	*Th*	*D*	*Dh*	*N*
U	as the 'u' in rule						
e	as the 'ey' in they	dentals	*t*	*th*	*d*	*dh*	*n*
ai	as the 'ai' in aisle						
o	as the 'o' in go	labials	*p*	*ph*	*b*	*bh*	*m*
au	as the 'ou' in loud						
R	as the 'r' in Sanskrit	semivowels	*y*	*r*	*l*	*v*	

Sibilants

As in	Beginning of word	Middle of word	Sanskrit Examples
Palatal 's' as in the German word 'sprechen'	Sh or sh	S	ISvara, darSana, paSyati, ViSvaM Shankara, shAnti, Shiva
Shutter, shame	Shh or shh	sh	Vishnu, Purusha, dvesha. ShhaNmukha,
Sun, sand	S or s	s	samsAra, SamsAra, Satva, satva, VAsanA

anusvAra *M*
visarga *H*
aspiration *h*

Important note: All titles of books are italicized; non-English titles are phonetically spelt. As a rule, Sanskrit words,(which are not proper names of places and people, except where emphasis is needed), are italicized. The **exceptions** are the following twelve words, where we use the popular spellings, without italics. Once for all we give their correct pronunciation below.

Popular spellings	To be pronounced (as per the convention above)
Aum	*om*
Rama	*Rama*
Krishna	*Krishna*

Brahma	*Brahma*
Vishnu	*Vishnu*
Narayana	*Narayana*
Gita	*Gita*
Mahabharata	*Mahabharata*
Ramayana	*Ramayana*
BhA.	*BhA.*
Upanishad	*Upanishad*
Vedanta	*Vedanta*
Dharma	*Dharma*
Avatara	*Avatara*

The analogous convention for the Tamil characters, for the purpose of this book will be as follows.

Tamil vowels	**Tamil Consonants**	**Examples**
a as the 'u' in but	*k*	*kalai*
A as the 'a' in father	*ng*	*engu*
i as the 'i' in mill	*c (or ch)(or s)*	*chennai, samaiyal*
I as the 'ea' in meal	*jna*	*jnAnam*
u as the 'u' in put	*T (or D)*	*kOTTai , kODai*
U as 'u' in rule	*N*	*paNam*
e as the 'e' in pet	*t*	*tEn*
E as the 'ey in they	*n*	*nAm*
ai as the 'ai' in aisle	*p (or b)*	*pAmbu*
o as the 'o' in won	*m*	*manam*
O as the 'o' in go	*y*	*yAr*
au as the 'au' in loud	*r*	*iravu*
	l	*mAlai*
	v	*vAnam*
	zh	*tamizh,*
	L	*paLLam*
	R	*tenRal*

Examples: *auvai*
kumara-Guru-paran
tenRal ; jnAyiRu
vAzhaip-pazham; mAmbazham
tiruvaLLuvar
Umai
tiru-jnAna-sambandar

The following abbreviations are used:

A.U.	Aitareya upanishat
B.G.	Bhagavad GItA
BhA.	BhAgavataM
Br.S	Brahma SUtraM
Br.U.	BRhadAraNyaka-upanishad
Ch.U.	ChAndogya-upanishad
I.U.	ISAvAsya-upanishad
L.S.	lalitA-SahasranAmaM
K.R.	Kamba RAmAyaNaM (Tamil)
Ka.U.	KaTha-upanishad
Ke.U	Kena-upanishad
M.N.U.	MahA-nArAyaNa-upanishad
Ma.U	MANDUkya-upanishad
Mu. U.	MuNDaka-upanishad
N. B.S.	NArada's Bhakti Sutra
Na.	NArAyNIyaM
P.U.	PraSna-upanishad
S.L.	ShivAnanda-lahari
Sv.U.	ShvetASvatara-upanishad
T.R	Tulsi's RAmCharita MAnas (Hindi)
T.U.	TaittirIya-upanishad
V.R.	ValmIki RAmAyaNaM
V.S.	Vishnu-SahasranAmaM

CHAPTER 1: COUNTLESS NAMES FOR THE NAMELESS

1. The First Prostration to The Lord of Lords – VinAyaka

There is no other God or divinity in the entire Hindu pantheon who has such a variety of interpretations and such a spectrum of legends as those associated with Lord *GaNeSa*. He is one of the six major divinities of Hinduism, namely, *SUrya, Shakti, Vishnu, GaNeSa, SubrahmaNya and Shiva*. However *GaNeSa* (or *GaNapati* or *VinAyaka* or *VighneSvara*, which are some of the most well known names of this divinity) is the one Divinity who is considered as the primal God of all worship and therefore always invoked at the commencement of any worship. Be it a secular function, a religious ritual, a marriage ceremony, an auspicious undertaking, or any individual or collective enterprise, He is propitiated first in order to have all obstacles removed. For the same purpose we are also beginning this book with our first prostrations to Him. There is no greater authority than *GaNapati*, the master of all the *gaNa*'s, namely of all the associates and disciples of *Shiva*. The word *gaNa's* also means divine soldiers who constitute the dynamics of divine action or management. Worshippers of other divinities have to worship Him first. But to worship Him one is not obliged to worship any other deity. He is the Lord Special. Therefore He is *VinAyaka*. (*nAyaka* means Lord and *vi* is the prefix denoting *viSishTa* which means distinguished or special). Everything about Him has an esoteric or philosophical meaning in addition to the mundane legends associated with Him.

In worshipping *GaNapati*, the devotee cuffs the head with a closed fist five times uttering his five names and prays for the removal of all obstacles. The five names are:

ShuklAm-bara-dhara, He who is clad in pure white
Vishnu He who pervades everything and everywhere
ShaSi-varNa, He who is of the cool colour of the moon
catur-bhuja, He who has four hands
prasanna-vadana, He whose face is always beaming with satisfaction.

The corresponding *Shloka* that is often uttered at the beginning of every worship or ritual is:

SuklAmbara-dharaM VishnuM SaSi-varNaM catur-bhujaM /
prasanna-vadanaM dhyAyet sarva-vighnopaSAntaye //

The deity is invoked here for meditation and reverence, through His five names. The obvious purpose is explicitly stated: 'in order to quell every form of an obstacle (for the work to be started)'. He Himself is the Lord of all obstacles, therefore He is *vighna-ISvara* (=*vighneSvara*); not just the queller of obstacles as the above invocation would motivate us to conclude – for in that case His name would have been *vighna-ghna-*

ISvara. So His name signifies He is at the same time the creator of obstacles and also the remover of them. He creates obstacles in order that people may shed their egoism (*ahaM-kAra*) and think of God with humility. People have to surrender their ego to Him with humility and he takes this offering of our ego, converts it into a mouse and neutralises it by sitting over it. When one thinks of Him thus with humility, He removes the obstacles to success and gives us *siddhi* – success or fulfillment, and *buddhi* – intelligence. The goddesses *siddhi* and *buddhi* are in fact the names of His two energy-consorts.

The four hands and the one trunk of this elephant-faced deity have esoteric significance. The **upper left hand** (with or without the noose) stands for Creation (or binding power). The binding power is what binds Matter and Spirit and is therefore the source of all this universe including all the living. The **lower right hand** (with or without the broken tusk) stands for Sustenance and Protection. He thus gives *abhaya*, Fearlessness. The **upper right hand** (with or without the hatchet) stands for Dissolution. The **lower left hand** with *modaka* or *laddu* (the standard sweet dish which is always associated with Him) stands for Grace. It gives Liberation (from the cycle of births and deaths). The **trunk** of the deity is His organ of smell and touch; it stands for Obliteration or Deception (*mAyA*).

The deity *vinAyaka* is the embodiment of *oM (*also *auM),* the symbol for the Absolute. With His right tusk broken, he represents the female principle by his right half and the male principle by his left half. So He represents the Transcendental Absolute which is beyond any gender principle. By His animal face and human limbs He signifies that He is beyond Man and Animal. The Absolute is also the Overlord of all the senses and their activates – as signified by the fact that He is *gaNa-pati* . The word *gaNa* also means 'category'. So *gaNa-pati* is the Lord of comprehension or consciousness. Though He holds the *modaka (*sweet dish*)* in His hand, his trunk is never shown as putting the *modaka* in His mouth. He just holds them. He watches. He is the Witness (= *sAkshi*) to everything. He does not Himself consume or experience. He is the Witness of Consciousness in each one of us. He is the symbol of the Primordial Power of Consciousness.

His elephant-head is adored as the emblem of wisdom. The elephant-headed God is sitting on a mouse, the smallest of animals – showing His mastery over everything from the micro to the macro. He is therefore the wisdom of comprehension of the relationship between the micro and the macro. The whole figure of *vinAyaka* with the sweet dish in His hand and with His pot-belly infuses an utter contentment typifying wisdom. It is the spiritual contentment of the fullness of the Absolute. The pot-belly also signifies that the entire universe is within Him. It is this contentment that makes Him dance sometimes. There are innumerable images and artistic representations of dancing *gaNapati*.

The *GaNapati*-Upanishad, from the *atharva-veda* has elaborate discourses on the glories of the divinity that is *gaNapati*. One such is :

All this universe springs from you, merges in you and everything goes back to you. You are Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Space. You transcend the three *guNa*'s – *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. You are beyond the three bodies – physical, subtle and causal. You are

beyond the three states of Time – past, present and future. You are Brahma, *Vishnu*, *indra*, *agni*, *vAyu*, Sun and Moon. You are the three *vyAhRti*'s and finally you are *Brahman* itself symbolised by *oM*

sarvam jagad-idaM tvatto jAyate, tvattas-tishTati, tvayi layaM eshyati, tvayi pratyeti / tvam bhUmi-rApo-nalo'nilo-nabhaH / tvaM guNa-trayA-tItaH / tvaM deha-trayA-tItaH / tvaM kAla-trayAtItaH / tvam BrahmA *tvam VishnuH tvamindras-tvam-agnis-tvam vAyus-tvaM sUryas-tvaM candramAs-tvaM* Brahma *bhUr-bhuvas-suvar-oM //*

2. Lord Subrahmanya

In certain orthodox traditions the five divinities - *SUrya, Shakti, Vishnu, GaNeSa, and Shiva* of the main tradition are all worshipped together through a sophisticated ritual called, *pancAyatana pUjA,* meaning worship at five altars. Here the divinities are worshipped not in their human-like forms but in certain symbols in the form of stones, which are nothing but certain rock formations available in specified locations in India. In this scheme of things, *GaNeSa* is the red *soNabhadra* stone found in the bed of the river Sone flowing into the Ganges. The *pancAyatana pUjA* tradition may be taken as an intermediate stage between the worship of Godhead with form and the worship of the formless, because the symbols of worship as rock formations have certainly a form but they are also formless in that they have no parts like face, eyes, body, hands or feet. It is as though the devotee trains himself to tune the mind from the forms to the formless while at the same time allowing full scope for his devotional feelings in favour of worship of the form. In addition to the five deities in the main tradition, there is one more, devoted to Lord *SubrahmaNya* particularly in the southern states of India. In Tamilnadu the deity is more popularly known as *murugan*. 'Murugan' in Tamil comes from the Tamil word 'murugu' which is said to connote the six qualities: Beauty, Freshness, Fragrance, Sweetness, Divinity, Joy. He is meditated upon by the six-lettered *mantra* '*Sha-ra-va-Na-bha-va'* . The six syllables connote Him who manifested as a personification of Auspiciousness, Light, Splendour, Bounty, Purity and Infinite Prowess. *SharavaNa-bhava* therefore means the one who is a combination of all these.

The mythology that goes with the deity is pretty complicated. Lord *Shiva* is the perfect yogi. The divines want a marriage of *Shiva* and Uma so that the war-God may be born out of that divine Union and the enemies Taraka, Surapadma and Simhamukha (who are esoterically the evils Dynamism (*rajas*), Ego (*ahaMkAra*) and Delusion (*Moha*) respectively) may be vanquished. The Love-God Manmatha is set upon by the Divines to disturb *Shiva*'s penance but *Shiva* burns him down to ashes by just a glance. Then Parvati (Uma) undertakes a penance to seek the hand of the Lord and the divine marriage takes place. But even after 1000 years of the marriage, no conception takes place. The *vIrya* (Energy) of the Lord was considered so potent that Uma was scared to receive it. Finally it was deposited with the Fire-God Agni, but the latter, again, was unable to bear it. Lord *Shiva* asked Agni to pour the flaming energy into the bodies of those who were suffering from the cold of the winter. The wives of six of the *saptarishis* (seven great sages) who were trembling with cold after their early morning bath, basked in the welcome warmth of the Fire. Arundhati, the wife of the seventh sage thought it was not the right thing to do and so did not join the others). In the process, the six Rishi-wives took in *Shiva*'s energy

which Agni passed into them through the pores of their skin. From there on the six wives carried the burden. Their husbands, the sages, cursed them that they would become just stars in the sky. That is how they became *kRttikAs*, (Pleides). But before this the *kRttikAs* unburdened *Shiva*'s energy in *SharavaNa* lake (at the southern end of Mount Kailas, according to one trdition and, according to another tradition, near Tiruchendur in the southernmost tip of India). This lake had itself been purified in times of yore by the body of Uma herself. When the demon Bhasmasura was threatening to put his hand on Lord *Shiva* and destroy Him, *Shiva* disappeared and in the agony of that disappearance, Uma split her body into thousand pieces which fell down in this very lake. This was why this lake of *Sara* grass had divine strength to receive *Shiva*'s seed.

Again in times of yore there was a boy who had seen the torture that the divines suffered under the hands of the demon Taraka. So he did a fierce penance for the purpose of vanquishing Tarakasura and he offered his own body to his sacrificial fire. He was later born as Sanatkumara, out of Brahma's will. This Sanatkumara taught the supreme wisdom to Narada. In *Ch.U.* he is identified with Skanda. The *kRttikA* sisters saw the falling of the seed in the *Shara* grass, were excited and themselves begot six children. They breast-fed the children and the six children became one child with six heads. According to another tradition, the scattered energy came together, formed one whole, flowed down the river Ganga, mingled with the *Sara* grass and a six-headed boy was then born. This boy was nurtured by the *kRttikA* sisters. He is therefore called *kArtikeya.* He is also called *Skanda* because the seed of *Shiva* 'fell' in this way. ('*skanna*' in Sanskrit means 'fallen', 'emitted') .The word '*skanda*' also means that which is gathered into one. The six divine sparks from the eyes of *Shiva* first took the form of six different babes. The Divine Mother hugged them all at once and the six merged into one form, *Skanda*.

Two goddesses *amuda-valli* and *sundara-valli* appeared from the two eyes of *mahAVishnu*. In the *SharavaNa* lake these two performed a long penance with the purpose of marrying Lord *SubrahmaNya*. The latter appeared before them and ordained that one of them should be born in the heavenly world and the other in the earthly world. Accordingly *amuda-valli* became a heavenly child and was adopted by Indra as his daughter. The other one *sundara-valli* did penance in a hillock in Tamilnadu and was born as *vaLLi*. These are the two consorts of *SubrahmaNya*. The first one devasenA who sits on the left of the Lord grants us heavenly bliss; the second one *vaLLi* sits on the right and confers on the devotee all earthly bliss. The spear of the Lord called *vEl* in Tamil confers *moksha* on the devotee. The two consorts and the *vEl* are said to represent the three *Shaktis* -- Energies: Will, Action and Knowledge -- of the Lord namely, *icchA-shakti, kriyA-shakti,* and *jnAna-shakti.*

The *Ch.U.* speaks of *skanda* as the Supreme Being. The word *SubrahmaNya* itself means the one who originated from *Brahman* in joy and is inseparable from the Bliss of the ultimate Reality. God subrahmaNya is primarily the preceptor who imparts the highest knowledge. He gave divine wisdom to his own father, *Shiva*, and so, He is *swAmi-natha* (the Lord of the Lord). He is a yogi and the Lord of palani hills and so He is *Palani-AnDavan*, (the Lord or God of Palani). He is the commander-in-chief of the gods and so He is *Deva-senA-pati*. His six faces confer the light of wisdom, grace, austerity, *mantra-*

shakti, victory over evil, and love. The six hills which are especially sacred to him are signified by the six *chakras* in the human body through which the kundalini rises to travel to the Supreme. In the *bhagavad-Gita*, the Lord says: *Among commanders, I am Skanda*. Shankara says that the six main qualities of Godhead (*bhagavAn*), namely, lordship, valour, fame, wealth, wisdom and detachment are signified by the six faces of *shanmukha*, which is again, another name for *SubrahmaNya*, because, it means, the six-faced one.

3. Idol Worship

The concept of God, gods and goddesses, and Godhead in Hinduism is too complicated to admit of any naïve explanation. Every physical expression amenable to sense perception is nothing but an expression of the Divine. In other words everything that you see, hear, touch, smell or taste is divine -- that is, comes from God. Since everything is God, you cannot ascribe an individual name and form to it. The moment you delineate God by one name or form you have circumscribed Him and limited Him by the shallowness of worldly expressions and imagery. In fact, anything that has name and form is a creation of the mind. Try to think of something which has neither name nor form. Even supposedly abstract concepts like colour are not abstract in our scientific understanding of the world; they have name and form. Even qualities like honesty and fairness can be recognised and talked about only through their names. Nothing that exists is without name and form. But all that exists has a common factor that subsists as a substratum in all. Just as all gold ornaments, though different in name and form, have gold as their commonality of content, just as all clay toys, though distinguishable by their name and form, are not distinguishable as clay, just as the movie screen is the base for all the drama that is superimposed on it while the screen itself is unsullied by any of the turmoil that 'takes place' on it -- so also the substratum of Divine Existence referred to as *Brahman* permeates everything in the world, and that being the common content of all that has name and form has no name or form for itself. The upanishads speak of it as 'that' in the neuter gender. This is the God, or more precisely, the Godhead of Hinduism. It is the source of all energy, and of all power, not only in Nature but in all beings, including humans.

QUESTION: But if this is the Ultimate Godhead of Hinduism why do we have practices in Hinduism like idol worship, for example, which totally contradict the concept that God is nameless and formless?

Exactly. Godhead is nameless and formless. But just as we gave a name '*Brahman*' to it in order to talk about it we could as well have gien it any other name. Here we come to the uniqueness of Hinduism. No name or form will describe Him fully. *Therefore*, say the vedas, all names and forms are His. An idol is only symbolic of this statement, that all names and forms are His. Hinduism carries this rationale to its logical conclusion and hence it is that we find a plethora of gods and goddesses in the framework of Hinduism. If we mistake them to be distinct divinities, each powerful in its own realm and warring with others for supremacy, as an unwary reader of the *purANas* may be led to think, then we have missed the central teaching of Hinduism: *ekam sat viprA bhavanti* -- There is

only one Truth; the wise speak of it in several ways. Since Godhead transcends all human description the concept becomes so sophisticated and complex that the ordinary mortal needs something concrete to cling to. This is where a human form or an idol enters the picture. An idol serves the same purpose for a religious devotee as a flag does for an army.

QUESTION: Does it mean then that an idol is only a representation and not the 'real thing'? But the Hindu tradition of giving absolute sanctity to temples and idols seems to point to the view that the idols themselves are the deities.

Wait. You are bringing in too many factors into the discussion too soon. In Hinduism the same question will have different answers to different levels of questioners. From the point of view that there is only one absolute Truth and everything else is only a manifestation of that Truth, an idol is only a representation and not the 'real thing'. But from the point of view of a devotee who needs to worship Divinity in name and form, the images and idols which have been sanctified by the various *mantras* and rituals are themselves the deities which have as much power as the Absolute. So a Balaji in Tirupati, a Nataraja in Chidambaram, a Meenakshi in Madurai, a Visvesvara-linga in Kasi, a Jagannath in Puri, a Guruvayoorappan in Guruvayoor, a Krishna in Udupi, a Varadaraja in Kanchi and a Venkatesvara in Pittsburg and hosts of such sanctified 'images and idols' should not be cast into the role of just a 'representation' of the Absolute as a flag for the army.

But it must be admitted that all worship is idol worship. Primitive man made a scrawl of a head on a rock and called it God. Civilized man shuts his eyes and imagines an anthropomorphic image with arms and legs and calls it God. Both are idols. The difference is not one of kind but of degree. Hinduism has the courage to say so and also has the humanity to admit within its fold even those who cannot rise above grossly concrete representations of God. A common illiterate labourer and an intellectual scholar require different concepts of God to satisfy them. So Hinduism declares that each can worship God in whatever form suits the competence and stage of spiritual evolution of the worshipper. The Absolute *Brahman*, in relation to the material universe is called Isvara. When we refer to Isvara in His creative aspect, we call Him *BrahmA*. Note the distinction between the word *Brahman* (which is a neuter gender noun, standing for the Absolute Transcendental Reality) and the word *BrahmA* (which is a masculine noun standing for the name of the Creator-Aspect of Godhead). When we refer to His aspect of sustainer and protector, we call Him *Vishnu*. When we think of Him in His destructive and dissolutive aspect, we refer to Him as *Shiva*. In each case the power or energy of the aspect is referred to as the corresponding Goddess. Just as sunlight is inseparable from the sun, so also is the power (*Shakti*) of *ISvara* inseparable from *ISvara* and India naturally worships this power as *parA-Shakti*, the Supreme Mother Goddess of the Universe.

The doctrine of *ishTa devatA* (favoured divinity) may now be stated. A person may choose the deity that satisfies one's spiritual longing and make that the object of one's adoration, love and worship. Since each name and form of God is only a symbol that

points to something that is beyond and since each is only a representative of some aspect or manifestation of the Supreme Reality, it is the entire array of all names and forms of God that will perhaps point to the fullness that is God. But it is advisable for each individual to concentrate on and have a special place for one particular manifestation or form of God and this would be his *ishTa devatA*. Even a person who has realised the *Brahman* as the Ultimate Reality that pervades everything, does not reject idol worship. For him all deities are alike. He is not averse to worshipping or meditating on any particular form of the Absolute. This is the reason why we see our *advaita AcAryas* give as much importance to *devatA* worship and temple offerings as the non-*advaita* (= non-Absolutist) *AcAryas.* Every variation of the *ishTa devatA* worship currently in vogue can be traced to one or other of the six traditions -- namely, the deities incorporated in the *pancAyatana pUjA* syndrome plus the tradition of worship of God *subrahmaNya*.

It is this variety that gives richness to Hinduism and it is this possibility, of 'to each according to his need and capacity' that brings together under one banner of Hinduism people with varying practices, attitudes and states of evolution. In all cases, however, since the permanent residence of God is in one's own heart, every time a Hindu worships outwardly, he creates an idol or a picture for the God of his choice, or the God that suits the occasion, invokes God in that idol or picture from his heart and worships it in all the external forms he likes. This method of *pUjA* (worship) is recommended to give devotion a concrete focus. Mark that it is God that is worshipped in the form of the idol and not the idol as God. So long as you think it is an idol you have not got it. People who do not believe in God find excuses to find fault with the worship of God through idols and appear to be 'more loyal' than the religious, by propagating the argument that God is formless and so should not be worshipped through idols. God can take any form and so the form of the idol is good enough for us to worship God. It is the Infinite Absolute *Brahman*, the all-knowing all-permanent Soul of our souls that is invoked into the form of the idol that is before us. 'Him the Sun cannot light, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor lightning, nor what we call fire; through Him all of them shine, and through His expression, everything is expressed':

na tatra sUryo bhAti na candra-tArakaM naimA vidyuto bhAnti kuto'yam-agniH /
tameva bhAntaM anubhAti sarvaM tasya bhAsA sarvam-idaM vibhAti // Mu.U. II-2-10

In ritual worship (*pUjA*) or at the end of a collective bhajan or recitation, the last ritual is the *Arti* (also called *dIpa-ARadhanA*) which is the ceremonial waving of a lighted lamp or camphor before the idolized God. Every Hindu temple will have such *Artis* to all the deities of the temple at several prescribed times of the day. The upanishadic passage above is one among the many that are recited at *Arti* time, at the conclusion of a *pUjA* performed in the vedic tradition.

4. One Truth, Many Expressions

It is necessary to warn the beginning reader about Hindu religion, thought and practice, that it is very common in Hindu scriptures to glorify different divinities in different contexts. Each time a divinity is glorified they talk about it as the highest Transcendental Supreme; not only that, the other divinities without exception are said to be subservient to

the divinity under consideration. It is difficult for a newcomer to Hindu thought to subscribe to this because he thinks of it as a confused hierarchy. Naturally he may misunderstand the whole presentation and think it is partisan. There is only one hypothesis by which one can save oneself from this misunderstanding. And that is the hypothesis which Hinduism declares from the mountain tops every time it has an opportunity. *There is only one Godhead whatsoever*. There is no hierarchy in the worldly sense of the word. Each manifestation or presentation of that Godhead, as per the context, is to be considered supreme, for the period of that context. It may be *VinAyaka* who is considered supreme or it may be *SubrahmaNya* in another *purANa* or Upanishad, and in another, Mother Goddess may be considered the supreme Godhead. Mother Goddess as the *GAyatrI* is the *parA-Shakti*, non-different from the absolute *Brahman*. She is the *umA* of Kenopanishad. She is the *devAtma-Shakti* of Svetasvatara-upanishad. She is the *parA-prakRti* of *bhagavad-Gita*. In another context, say the Ramayana, Lord Rama may be considered as the Absolute *Brahman*. The right understanding would be to consider all divinities to be so many presentations of the same one Godhead about which the entire gamut of scriptures talk in so many varied ways.

For several centuries there has existed an internal dissension (which is happily disappearing now amidst the modern onslaught of anti-religious attitudes) within Hinduism, particularly among the orthodox wing, about which name or what God is ultimate - *Shiva* or *Vishnu*. The vedic literature does not distinguish between the worship of *Shiva* or *Vishnu*. If we carefully go through the rituals which are totally veda-based, the names *Vishnu* and *Shiva* would occur almost indiscriminately without any connotation of the differences we attribute to the forms denoted by the two names today. Whether it is *Shiva* or *Vishnu* it refers only to the Supreme God -- this is the intent of the vedas. 'He is BrahmA, He is *Shiva*, He is *Vishnu*, He is Indra, He is the Imperishable, He is the Transcendental Supreme', says the *nArAyaNopanishad* part of the *yajur-veda*.This teaching of non-difference is important for the proper understanding of Hinduism. It is the same principle as in idol worship. So long as you think it is an idol, you have not got it. So long as you think it is *Shiva* or *Vishnu* and not the Transcendental Supreme you have not got the purport of the vedas. References to this identity among the literature composed by devotees of *Shiva* are innumerable; but this is not surprising since most of the devotees of *Shiva* also appreciate the non-dualist philosophy. But references to the identity of all names of God are also available in Vaishnava literature; here is a sample. NammALvAr, the Tamil Saint-poet, who is the foremost of the twelve AlvArs and whose contribution of 1352 poems to the four thousand *prabandhams* of Vaishnava tradition is considered as the Tamil Veda, writes: *There are persons and persons, each has a different god according to one's intelligence, and the god of none is inferior; and each reaches salvation as per the dictates of their own god:*

avar avar tamadamadu aRivu aRivagaivagai avar iRaiyavar ena aDi aDaivargaL/
avar avar iRaiyavar kuRaivu ilar iRaiyavar avar vidi vazhi adaiya ninRanare //
Tamil: *tiruvAymozhi* 1-1-5

Even if we scrutinise hard and discuss it further, the concepts of BrahmA, Vishnu and Shiva -- after all the verbal exchanges, tantamount to only one God of which these three are the names:

uNarndu uNarndu uraittu ari aran ennum ivarai uNarndu uNarndu uraittu uraittu irainjumin manappaTTadu onRe // Tamil: *tiruvAymozhi* 1-1-5

Thus God is One, inspite of His many names and forms. Many youngsters who have been influenced by the organized religions of the western world constantly express doubts about the rationale of the multiplicity of gods and goddesses in the Hindu religious ethos. In this connection there is a poetic riddle posed to Kalidasa by King Bhoja, which has a great relevance to this concept of Plurality being secondary, wheras one-ness is primary. If the Sanskrit language had only one word for 'ocean' the tantalising riddle of King Bhoja and the enchanting solution of the poet Kalidasa would both have been non-existent. It is only when there is multiplicity, diversity and variety there is life, there is challenge, there is employment. The challenge may be demanding but Hinduism has not only learnt to live with it but also enjoys it as is evident from the endless festivals and colourful celebrations with a convenient mixture of devotion and extravagance, connected with the temples all over India. The many names and forms of God suit the multifarious tastes of people and their different levels of spiritual evolution. Multiplicity is for enjoyment and the one-ness at the back, at the base, at the bottom, is for Peace. Though different manifestations are being talked about all the time, the names and characteristics which pertain to these names and forms contribute only to the multiplicty that the One Ultimate Godhead seems to delight in expressing itself. When a Hindu worships the Sun as the Sun-God, what he is worshipping is the Absolute supreme in its manifestation as the sun. A *purANa* dedicated to *Shiva* may extol *Shiva* as the highest God, the transcendental Supreme and a *Vishnu purANa* may say the same thing about *Vishnu*. There is no contradiction meant, implied or slurred over. When Hinduism says that all names and forms are those of God it means it. The external multiplicity is only an expression of the underlying truth of unity. (See also the Section entitled ‘Purana’ in the Chapter ‘Meet the Ancient Scriptures’).

5. Glory of the Lord’s Name

Among the nine forms of the expression of *bhakti (see the Section on Prahlada Charitam in Chapter 7)*, four have contemporary relevance:

- *ShravaNaM,* that is, listening to recitals of names and glories of God (as did King Parikshit, grandson of Arjuna);
- *nAma-samkIrtanam,* that is, reciting the names of God (as did Narada, Chaitanya, Mira and Thiagaraja);
- *smaraNam* , that is, recalling Him and His deeds, (as did the boy-sage Shuka); and
- *arcanam* , that is, worshipping Him with ritualistic repetition of His names, (as did King Ambarisha).

All these rest on the glory of the Lord's name and the majesty of His deeds. Their rationale is that the mind is always riddled with desire and hate, lust and greed, and so is as unsteady as a sailboat in an ocean and as such, needs a symbol, an *Alambanam* (prop) upon which the Lord can be superimposed for the purpose of single-minded concentration. The Lord's name serves as this symbol. Reciting God's names, repeating

them in a certain rhythmic pattern, recalling God's majesty and splendour, His immanence and transcendence, His omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, His perfection -- these are the ways in which one uses the *Alambanam* of God's names for turning the mind inward. When man is at an elementary stage of spiuritual evolution, as is the case with most of us, the recitation and repetition of God's names has been held to be the panacea for all the ills of *samsAra*. Repeating the name of the Lord is a potent discipline for making progress towards *moksha*. The prop of God's names to turn the mind inward is used in every religion. But in Hinduism, it is the central cord that unmistakably vibrates throughout its vast tradition, literature and culture. The eloquence with which this literature is extolled by Sage Narada to VyAsa in a dramatic revelation about his own life must be enjoyed in the original. (BhA. I - Chapter 5) *Only that literature is worthwhile, says Narada (Shloka 11, ibid) which is replete with the transcendental glories of the name, fame and miracles of the Infinite Supreme Lord. Only such a literature will bring about a revolution in the impious ways of our misdirected civilization. Even if that literature is imperfectly composed, goes on Narada, it will be heard, sung and accepted by honest people all over the world.:*

tad-vAg-visargo janatAgha-viplavo yasmin prati-Shlokam-abaddhavatyapi /
nAmAnyanantasya yaSonkitAni yat SRNvanti gAyanti gRHNanti sAdhavaH //

According to Narada, VyAsa, in his several *purANas*, did not emphasize this aspect sufficiently and that was why VyAsa, even after so many scriptural texts, felt dissatisfied, unfulfilled, almost desolate. It was on the prompting by Narada that VyAsa created the *BhA.* which is out and out, a work of *bhakti* in which the glories of the Lord are sung throughout, exquisitely blended with metaphysical exposition.

However, despite Narada's criticism, we of the *kali-yuga* must be thankful to VyAsa for interpolating in the narrative part of all his *purAN*as, innumerable *stotras* (poems of praise) which have served over the centuries as texts for recitations and repetitions of God's names and glories. Some of them contain as many as one thousand and eight names of the Lord. These are called *sahasra-nAmas* (litanies of one thousand names). Historical developments on the Indian subcontinent led during the centuries following the tenth, to the submergence and partial disappearance of earlier *bhakti* traditions. But mediaeval times saw a revival of varied schools of *bhakti* across the land, a revival that had a very positive significance in the development of modern Hinduism in as much that it de-emphasized the role of ritualistic paraphernalia and rightly brought into focus the fact that *bhakti* is the only path to salvation. The schools of Ramanuja, Chaitanya, the Saiva and Vaishnava saints of the south, the author of the Ram-charita-mAnas, Swami Bodendra, Saint Thiagaraja, classic devotees like Tukaram, Mirabhai and Purandaradasa and many others, all contributed to this revival. To them is due the credit for keeping the torch alive during Hinduism's bleak centuries. It was thus that the present tradition of musical devotion came into prominence all over India.

For those who are not in a posititition to read or recite a *stotra*, Hindu tradition has provided innumerable *bhajans*, devotional songs with a refrain, set to captivating tunes, particularly suitable for being sung in a chorus by a congregation. In these *bhajans*, a variety of God's several names are repetitively strung together in a melody and rhythm

that are so delightfully musical that one is carried into ecstasy even by simply listening to them. This tradition of musical devotion came into prominence all over India mainly after the revival of the Bhakti movement in the 15th and 16th centuries. The unceasing repetition of the classic '*Hare Krishna'* chant by traditional bhajan singers as well as by the members of the contemporary Krishna Consciousness movement is one such. One might have wondered how these devotees could even dance in ecstasy singing this bhajan. In fact they maintain that the worship of the Lord with song and dance must be done by the devotees as a daily duty. They have made this tradition come alive on an international scale. The schools of various Godmen, particularly the Sai movement which has roots in all the countries now across the world, have also popularised this *bhajan* tradition to such an extent and so innovatively that it is no more a congregation professing just one religion and has thus become the greatest integrating phenomenon of all humanity who believe in the existence of a Divinity Which is immanent, transcendent and perfect.

QUESTION: When the vedas prescribe costly, elaborate and difficult sacrifices and rituals for man's salvation, how can mere praise of the Lord, which costs no money, substitute for them?

The very ease with which one can practise *nAma-sankIrtana* (= perfect singing of names of God. '*nAma*': names ; '*kIrtana*': singing or reciting; '*sankIrtana*': singing with perfection) is a factor in its favour. It is highly recommended by every Hindu scripture for many reasons. It is the only mode open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, status of enlightenment, state of mind or any other distinction. It does no harm to others. It is not conditioned by time; any time is good enough. It is not conditioned by place; there is no rule which says, you have to do kirtana only here and not there. There is no ritualistic requirement. The recitation of names can purify you both internally and externally and take you to the highest level of attainment, namely, *moksha* itself.

apavitraH pavitro vA sarvA-vasthAm gato'pi vA /
yas-smaret-punDarIkAksham sa bAhyAbhyantaraH SuciH //
Whether one is personally impure or pure,
whatever may be one's physical or mental state,
one who seeks *punDarIkAksha* (the lotus-eyed Lord) with his heart
becomes pure both externally and internally:

mAnasaM vAcikaM pApam karmaNA samupArjitaM /
SrIRama-smaraNenaiva vyapohati na samSayaH //
Sins of action, sins of the mind and sins of the tongue -
are all eradicated, without doubt,
by just the remembrance of the name *SrI-Rama*. :

Since the recalling of the names of God is of the purest of the pure (*pavitrANAm pavitram*) these two verses are invariably recalled at the beginning of every Hindu religious rite.

6. Power of Names of God

Question: How can mere words and repetition of words have so much power?

Yes, mere words and repetitions of words do have great power. First, let us consider a simple explanation. Those who rely totally on the limited laws of science and reason may argue that words are, after all, just sound and cannot be expected to cleanse or correct the mind of man. But a word is not just a sound. Kalidasa, in the very first *shloka* of his Raghuvamsam, very expressively brings out the identity between *vAk* (word uttered) and *artha* (its meaning, significance) by comparing it to the intertwining between the male and female forms in the ardha-nAr*ISvara* representation of Shiva. When we say 'table' the four-legged piece of furniture instantaneously appears as mental picture. You cannot think of one without the other. People are sitting quietly in, say, a meeting. Somebody calls, 'Snake!'. Will the calm continue? Just the word 'snake' magically destroys it. One might be sitting before a plateful of delicacies, but if somebody nearby speaks of something dirty or disgusting, one is repelled by the food. The mere sound of words creates so strong a reaction.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba tells an unforgettable story that illustrates this. A certain officer was inspecting the work of a teacher in a school. The officer who had a hearty contempt for 'mere talk' asked the teacher, "How can you ever hope to transform the nature of these children by the words you utter? Show them by deeds: act, don't speak!" The teacher protested and argued that words do have a profound effect on the mind. The argument continued for some time and the teacher was desperately looking for some way of carrying home his point. At last he resolved on a plan. He said to one of his pupils: 'Look here, catch hold of this officer by the neck and push him out of the room.' Hearing this, the inspector flew into a rage and started berating the teacher. The teacher said, 'Sir, I only made some sounds shaped into a few words. No one pushed you or hit you or even touched you. It was all mere sound. But see how it has enraged you. It was all mere sound. Words, sir, do help in modifying character and shaping nature. They have vast power.'

And Sathya Sai Baba continues to explain: "When words referring to worldly situations have such an electric transforming effect on the mind of man, certainly words conveying spiritual and elevated meaning will help in cleansing and correcting the mind of man . When we filter the air with harshness, we become harsh in nature, when we fill the atmosphere with hatred, we too have perforce to breathe that air and we are hated in return. When we saturate the air with sounds full of reverence, humilty, love, courage, self-confidence and tolerance, we benefit from those qualities ourselves. The heart is the film and the mind is the lens. Turn the lens toward the world and a worldly picture will fall on the heart. Turn it towards God and it will transmit pictures of the Divine".

There is another explanation, an esoteric one, for the efficacy of *nAma-sankIrtana*. It is a natural outpouring of sentiments from the heart and leads to a communion between God and Man. During *nAma-sankIrtanas* a charmed circle of sound is produced and a strange sense of the greatness of God and the essential unity of man creeps into the soul. With

the successive awakening of each of the six yogic chakras in the human body, there are corresponding changes in one's body, emotions, mind and degree of consciousness. The progressive expansion of consciousness yields an increase of knowledge about oneself and a deepening awareness of the self-luminant Resident of the body, namely, the *Atman*.

The Kundalini *shakti*, which sleeps as it were at the MulAdhAra chakra can be made by yoga practices to wake up, evolve and travel upwards through the sushumnA nADi. While it does so it is imperceptible to the senses. But every day it expresses itself, in every one of us, in all our activities. Particularly the expression of it in the form of the human voice is known as the manifestation of *nAda-Brahman*, the Sound Absolute. Thus in the perfection of the human voice the primeval energy comes to prominence through the words, sentences, and *mantra*s we utter. We do not realise, in our ignorance, that it is the Absolute Supreme that is expressing itself through our voice and that the satisfaction we derive in saying whatever we say is only an iota of that Infinite Bliss which is in us. If only we could recite the names of God unendingly, it would take us towards an identity with the *nAda Brahman* at every step. A bhajan of the several names of the Infinite Being (like the Hare Krishna *mantra*) creates the necessary vibrations, starting from the *MulAdhAra-chakra*. An unceasing *nAma-sankIrtana* cleanses the crust of *vAsanA*s that has accumulated over several births, and thus paves the way for the stored-up Kundalini energy to get tuned to the frequency of the Infinite Energy in the Cosmos.

The recitation of the names should come from the heart, not just from the lips or the tongue. It must be a spontaneous manifestation of inner conviction and ecstasy. Such intense yearning for God purifies oneself as well as those around. Life is full of sorrow, beset with fear and despair. The only way one strengthens oneself to meet hard times is to contact the source of all strength and bliss, namely the Infinite God. This is the way to overcome the evil in us, lay low the '*pashu*' (beast) in us and instal the '*pashu-pati'* (Lord of all beings) in our hearts.

In reciting the names, however, one should not be guilty of offences to the Name. Such offences will more than offset the benefits of *nAma-smaraNa*. One should not insult or speak ill of others, since every one is divine. No distinction should be made between different names or forms of God, though one may have some tastes in the matter –which, mostly is because of one's background of evolution, not only in this birth, but in all previous births. The Divine Name should be looked upon as supreme truth and not as mere eulogy.

It is true that the repetition of God's names will absolve one of all sins, but on that account one should not use the name as a cloak for the commission of sins. The cultivation of the five basic virtues, namely, Purity, Self-Control, Detachment, Truth and Non-violence, should not be neglected. One should not behave in a way which is devoid of love; one should not be governed by the conceits of 'I' and 'Mine'. The fundamental principle of *nAma-snaraNa* and *nAma-sankIrtana* is *shraddhA* (faith and conviction). Love of, and exclusive devotion to, the Lord, is necessary. When one does such a nAma-smaraNa it becomes a yajna in itself. The Lord Himself says in the *Gita*: 'Of all yajnas I

am the japa-yajna'. The theme of *nAma-smaraNa* or a *bhajan* or a *japa* should be that the one Supreme Almighty, who is spoken of by different names, is the subtlest of things ever experienced, though hard to analyse or apprehend by ordinary commonsense and, therefore, every name of His should take us to Him, if we realise the intrinsic value thereMantra

7. Mantra

A *mantra* is a vedic hymn, sacrificial formula, a mystical verse or an incantation. In general, it connotes any sacred chant or formula having the power to secure the blessings of God, when lovingly and reverently repeated. One warning has however to be mentioned. One has to respect the rule that no *mantra* would be efficacious unless it is learnt orally from a *guru*, who has himself that *mantra-siddhi*. By *mantra-siddhi*, one means that the *mantra* has sufficiently been meditated upon and repeated by the person concerned that the deity of the *mantra* has been realised by the person. The number of times required for this *mantra-siddhi* varies from *mantra* to *mantra*. Very often it goes into several hundreds of thousands. The word *mantra* in Sanskrit means 'that which protects by being meditated upon'. (*mananAt trAyate iti mantrah)*. This protection by the deity of the *mantra* does not devolve on you until you have sufficiently identified yourself with the *mantra*, heart and soul. Only such a person can be a *guru* for that *mantra*. The *mantra* itself is considered as the embodiment in sound of some specific deity or supernatural power. So taking the *mantra* by oneself without a *guru* is disrespect to the *mantra* itself and therefore doubly, a disrespect to the *mantra-devatA* (= the deity of the *mantra*). Yes, in that sense, the Hindu *mantras* are exclusive, no doubt. But that very fact connotes the sacredness of these *mantras*. A nuclear power, for instance, cannot be in the hands of every one. It has to be in the hands of those who will use it only for peaceful purposes. To wish to use such a force on the physical level is to assume the role of God and to satisfy unrestrained egos, positive or negative. Even a Visvamitra misused the power that he got from *Gaayatri*, the Queen of all *mantras*, more than once and that was why he took so much time and went through several hurdles before he was recognised. One has to be equipped for it, by self-sacrifice, by personal undertaking of suffering for the sake of the good of the others, by a personal attitude of renuciation to the pleasures of the world and by a total feeling of dedication to the cause of the good, the noble and the Cosmic Ecology.

Question: *Why is GAyatrI the Queen of all mantras*?

For the meaning of the GayatrI see the section 'The Fundamental Urges of Man' in the Chapter 'An Initial Exposure to the Spiritual Ascent'. The essence of Hinduism, namely that Divinity is everywhere, it is that Divinity that energizes us into thought and action and it is only with the help of that eternal omnipresent Divinity that we may ever hope to have a discerning intellect with which we may see the effervescence of the Godhead that is inherent in the visible universe including ourselves -- all this is built into this *Gaayatri mantra* of three quarters. The very word *Gaayatri* means that it protects those who chant it. Protecting here is for the sake of the Ultimate. Once the path to the Ultimate is protected, everything else is protected, not only of those who chant it but of the very

neighbourhood, of the environment, of the world in which they live. Those who have had the privilege of being initiated into the *mantra* of the *Gaayatri* have the added responsibility of not allowing it to decay with them. *Mantras* have to be protected by repeated chanting, and meditation on their meaning and significance. The *japa* and *dhyaana* on what *Gaayatri* stands for has been the cultural heritage of the Hindus. In spite of the fact that this responsibility has been allocated to only a small fraction of the total population, the power of the *mantra* is so much that it has been protecting the entire civilisation for mankind. It is not necessary that every one of the population has to chant it. Those *varnas*, however, who had the privilege and responsibility defaulted on the maintenance of this privilege by failing to live up to their responsibilities and have trampled the *Gaayatri* under their feet. Many of this privileged section, particularly the brahmins, have gone therefore in evolution far below those that did not have the privilege but only did the chanting of the names of God. For the same reason, many God-men of modern times have opened out the *Gaayatri* to all those who are interested.

8. Aum, Rama, Krishna, Narayana & Shiva

The unmistakable central chord that vibrates throughout the vast tradition and literature of the Hindu religion is the power of the *mantra*. In fact if there is one thing that is common to all the votaries of the religion, spread through its multifarious sects and schools, it is the value and significance that get attached to *mantras* -- though the *mantras* themselves may differ from sect to sect and from school to school. The *mantra* may be just a name, *naama*, the name of a deity enshrined in a temple or of an *avataara* of God or of God thought of without any reference to a temple or location. Nowhere else in the world do we have anything to match the long streamlined poems, densely packed with meaning and seemingly endless recitals of the Lord's names, glories and splendours, with no sacrifice of poetic elegance or grace. The rhythmic sound effects and the elevating moods that these poems of praise can produce must be heard to be believed. The names of God have been given great sanctity by the vedas themselves. That is where we find the basic *mantras* such as *Om namah sivaaya*, *Om namo naaraayanaaya*, where the names themselves contribute to the significance of the *mantra*s. *Om* by itself is the mystic word which is most important for the religious and spiritual pursuit of a Hindu. Without an explanation and understanding of this word no study of Spirituality in Hindu religion may be complete. The word consists of a triad of three sounds (*maatras*), namely '*a*' (as the 'u' in 'but'), '*u'* (as the 'u' in 'put') and '*m*'.This is why many texts referring to this word use the spelling '*aum*' thus emphasizing the three '*maatras*' which make up '*om*'. The term *maatra* is used for the upper limb of the *deva-naagari* characters and a syllabic instant in prosody. The esoteric significance of these three *maatras* and the myriads of connotations that they stand for are the subject matter of many passages in the Upanishads, the *Gita* and other scriptures. In fact, a whole Upanishad (though a very small one), namely, *Maandookyopanishad*, devotes itself entirely to the explanation of the word *Om*. This Upanishad for this very reason, has been termed the quintessance of vedanta. *Om* is spoken of here as the primeval word which stands for the entire universe permeated by *Brahman* and therefore *Brahman* itself. The three sounds that go to make up *Om* constitute symbolically the entire universe of words. For, '*a*' is the sound with which the human mouth is opened to speak any word and '*u*' is the sound which allows the tongue

all positions from the palate to the lips, and '*m*' is the vocal movement one makes to close the lips. Every sound which man can produce is between the extremes of 'a' and '*m*' and so, together with the intermediate stage of '*u*' it represents everything words represent.

Esoteric significance of AUM

Esoterically the '*a*' stands for the first stage of wakefulness, where we experience, through our gross body and the senses and the mind the totality of external experiences. The '*u*' stands for the state of dream sleep in which mental experiences are available, though erratically, by the mind which is the only thing awake, without the help of the external sense organs or the presence of the discriminating intellect. The two kinds of experience, namely, those of the waking state and those of the dream state, contradict each other, in the sense that a man may experience hunger in a dream though he has eaten in the waking state a few minutes earlier. In the state of deep sleep, represented by the sound '*m*' there is no consciousness of any experience; even the mind has gone to sleep. But still there is an awareness after the deep sleep is over that one has been sleeping. The Ma.U. says that in the state of deep sleep the *Atman* which is always present, has been the witness to the sleep of the body and it is this which brings back the memory. It is the *aatman* which is also present beyond the three states of experience and this fourth state (*turiiyaa-vasthaa)* corresponds to the silence that ensues after one has steadily pronounced '*om*'. It is the state of 'no *maatraa*' (= *amaatraa*). In that state of silence Consciousness alone is present and there is nothing else, and therefore nothing is to be cognized or be conscious of. So when we recite '*om*' we are advised to meditate on this common substratum of all the three states of experience, and, during the silence that follows, merge in the Consciousness that alone persists as a substratum. That Consciousness is the *Atman* , that is*Brahman*. Such is the symbolism behind the scriptures' repeated insistence that the word OM i s the supreme *aalambana* (= prop) to reach *Brahman*, it is the one thing which is talked about by all the vedas and it is for this alone that sages do penance and undergo austerities. It represents both the *Brahman* with attributes and the *Brahman* without attributes. It is a reminder of the true state of being .Hence it is that *OM* is repeated at the beginning and conclusion of everything. It indicates that we, as part of the universe, emanate from *Brahman* and finally dissolve into *Brahman*. The *jiiva* which leaves the body in the midst of conscious *OM* recitation is said to merge in *Brahman* itself, that is, attain *moksha*. The essential condition for this conscious recitation at the time of death is the undeviating memory of the Divine throughout life, through all its ups and downs. Hence it is that all *mantras* begin with OM. Meditation on the word is recommended for the yogi as a direct path to realization. As the generality of men cannot realize the ultimate reality which is beyond all categories of time, space and causation, the *Maanduukyopanishad* and its commentator, Gaudapada, recommend the contemplation of the three sound symbols as the three states of man's totality of experience and thus, analysing one's experience, the student endowed with the mental and moral qualifications required for the understanding of vedanta, is helped to reach ultimate reality. Specifically, if one identifies the *amaatraa* state of silence with the fourth state of experience and meditates on it without intermission, one realizes one's self and 'there is no return for him to the sphere of empirical life'.

'Rama' as taaraka mantra

The derivation of words from their root syllables each of which is the root of a verb signifying an action, is, in the Sanskrit language a very instructive excercise. Hindu religious literature is replete with such derivations for almost every word that it uses. Each of the names of God like Rama, Krishna, *Shiva* , Narayana, etc. -- in fact, each one of the names of God in the various lists of thousand names of God (= *sahasra-naamas*) has been assigned several derivations from their root syllables. 'The one in whose memory yogis revel in the bliss of *Brahman*' -- is the meaning of the word Rama. *ramante yogino-nante brahmaanande chidaatmani* -- is the declaration in the Padma-purana. '*ramante*' (they revel, enjoy) is the action which forms the root verb for 'Rama'. The greatness of the word 'Rama' is not just because what the son of Dasaratha did what he did. Preceptor Vasishta hit upon the name for the child of Dasaratha because he knew that it was already a '*taaraka-mantra*' -- that is, the *mantra* which takes you across the ocean of *samsaara*. And that is why the name Rama has been isolated and earmarked to be equivalent to the whole of *Vishnu sahasra-naama*.

There are only two *mantras*, in the whole of Hindu religious tradition, which get the epithet '*taaraka*' (that which can ferry you across); and these are the syllable *OM*, and the name Rama. This single fact epitomises the importance associated with Rama, the name as well as the Godhead, in the entire Hindu cultural milieu. The sage Valmiki before he became a Maharshi, recited the name of Rama, several thousands of years and attained the status of a maharshi. The syllable 'ra' comes from the eight-lettered *mantra* of Narayana and the syllable '*ma*' comes from the five lettered *mantra* of *Shiva*. Both are the life-giving letters (= jiiva-aksharas) of the respective *mantra*s; because without them the two *mantra*s become a curse. Without these letters, the *mantra naraayanaaya* becomes *na ayanaaya* - meaning, not for good; and *namas-sivaaya* becomes *na sivaaya* - meaning, again, not for good. Thus the word Rama combines in itself the life-giving letters of the two most important *mantra*s of the Hindu religion .The syllable 'ra' the moment it comes out of the tongue purifies you from all the sins by the very fact that it comes from the *mantra* of the protector, Naaraayana. On the other hand, the syllable 'ma' burns all the sins by the very fact that it comes from the *mantra* of *Shiva*, the destroyer. This is therefore the King of all *mantra*s, the holy jewel of *mantra*s, as is rightly sung by Saint Thiagaraja, who is one of the most famous recent historical examples of persons who attained the jivan-miukti stage - the released stage even while alive by the sheer repetition of the Rama name.

That the name of God itself constitutes a *mantra* is the grand principle of the *naama-smarana* (= remembering of God's names) and *naama-sankirtana* (= musical singing of God's names) embedded in the Hindu tradition. This has been most dramatically confirmed by the modern International Krishna Consciousness Movement by the meteoric popularity generated by them for the '*hare krishna*' *mantra*:

hare krishna hare krishna krishna krishna hare hare /
hare rama hare rama rama rama hare hare //

The ecstasy with which the Krishna Consciousness devotees dance and jump at the musical chanting of this *mantra*, accompanied by cymbals, singly and collectively, for hours together, is a sight to be seen to be believed. God is *harih*, because the root word *har* means to destroy; He destroys *samsaara* (= the cycle of births and deaths) as well as sins of man. He carries away (= *harati*) the sins of even evil-minded people. He attracts everything by His charm, therefore He is Krishna. He is Krishna, also because the root *Kr* indicates Existence and the syllable *na* indicates Bliss. By His very existence He gives bliss, therefore Krishna. From this meaning several traditions about the word Krishna have arisen. Whatever ritualistic purifications are prescribed in the form of penances and sacrifices, they are all superseded by the very remembrance of Krishna the Lord -- says an age-old verse. Says another such verse: The only medicine to cure the one bitten sharply by the serpent of *samsaara* is the great *mantra* glorifying the Lord *Vishnu*, namely 'Krishna'. The sanctity of the *hare krishna mantra* goes back to one of the Upanishads, known as *kali-santarana*-Upanishad.

The eight-lettered *mantra* of Narayana and the five-lettered *mantra* of *Shiva* are the two greatest *mantras* of Hindu religion, next only, if at all, to the *Gaayatri mantra*. Volumes can be written about the name Narayana, which is to be pronounced as *naaraayaNa*, though we shall stick to the more popular spelling, Narayana. *nara* means *aatman*, that is, *Brahman* itself. All the elemental principles emanated from it, therefore they are *naara*. They are the effects of the Supreme which is the Ultimate Cause, the Cause of all causes, for them all. The cause always pervades the effect. Without a cause, there is no effect. Wherever there is an effect there must be a cause. Therefore the effects which are the *naaras* are pervaded by the original cause, which is *Brahman*. This is what is indicated by the word Narayana. This name has been extolled to the skies in all the puranas and other scriptures. The Tamil veda says: it is the word which does all the good more than the mother. Whatever sense experiences one goes through, whether it is inside or outside, everything is pervaded by the Lord Narayana -- says the Upanishad. They are all in me (*mayi te*) and I am in them (*teshu chaapyaham*) says the Lod in the *Gita* (IX - 29). That everything is in Him is the *bahir-vyaapti* (= transcendence; *bahih* = outside). That He is in everything is the *antar-vyaapti* (= immanence; *antah* = inside). Transcendence and Immanence are the T and I of the TIP of the Iceberg that is the Godhead. These two are now in capsule form in the single name Narayana, where one takes the meaning of *ayana* as support, or base or substratum. *Ayana* also indicates both the 'means' (= *upaaya)* and the 'end' (= *upeya*). So Narayana may mean 'He (= His name) is the means and He is the end' as also 'He (= His Grace) is the means and He is the end'.

The ‘Shiva’ name is said to be the ‘Gem of all Life’ (= *jIva*-ratnam). Literally ‘*Shiva*’ means auspicious. The Lord is so full of Love that Love itself is said to be *Shiva*. ‘*anbe Shivam’* says the Tamil scriptures. Just the two letters *Si* and *va* when vocalized removes all sins. The five-lettered *mantra* Om namah-SivAya has been extolled as representative of the entire *Veda*s. The five syllables *na, ma, Si, vA* and *ya* represent respectively the five fundamental elements Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space; they are indicative of the five psychic centers of the body starting from the *mUlAdhAra* upto *viSuddhi*. The sixth center namely, the AjnA cakra is indicative of OM.

This is only the thin end of the wedge as far as the greatness of the '*Shiva*' name is concerned. It has an added importance in that it occurs in the Rudram chapter.

The greatness of the Rudram Chapter

One of the most thrilling and spiritually satisfying Vedic recitations is that of the Rudra-prashna of Krishna Yajur Veda. It is seen in all the 100 branches of the Yajurveda, it is also called Shata-rudrIyam. It is one of the five scriptural texts chosen by the ancients for constant repetition and meditation. The other four are: *V.S.,* B.G., *Purusha*-sUktam and the Upanishad of one's own branch of the Veda. It is also known as Rudropanishad, because the three hundred prostrations to Shiva which constitute the central part of Rudram take one to Ultimate Self-Realisation itself. The theme is that Rudra-Shiva is all pervasive; He is behind and beyond all forms of Divinity; nay, even all forms of human and sub-human beings. To hear it chanted according to the South Indian style collectively in a full-throated fashion is itself a spiritual flight to heavenly Bliss and Beyond. The Jabala Upanishad says 'By the repetition of the Shatarudra one gains immortality, for the names of God therein are nectarine'. The Kaivalya Upanishad says; ' He who recites the Shatarudriyam is cleansed of all sins as if by fire. He becomes free from the sins of theft, man-slaughter or commission of a prohibited act. He is like one who has taken refuge in the city of Avimukta (Varanasi). By this a man attains that knowledge which destroys the sea of samsara. Thus knowing he enjoys the fruit of Kaivalya or Bliss'.

The '*Shiva*' name occurs as the *mantra* '*namah-SivAya'* in the *Rudram* chapter almost in the center of the middle *Veda*, namely the *yajur-Veda*. The latter consists of 7 volumes (= *kANDas*), each of which is divided into several chapters (= *praSnas*). Each *praSna* is divided into paragraphs (= *anuvAkas*) and each paragraph is counted in terms of subparagraphs (= *pancASat*). Every *pancASat* contains fifty words or when it is the ending subparagraph of a paragraph, it may contain a few more or a few less. The following statistics will now show that the *mantra namah-SivAya* occurs in the middle *kANDa,* and very near the middle *praSna*, the middle *anuVAka*, and the middle *pancASat*; in fact, amidst a total of around 110,000 words it misses the center of the *yajur-Veda* by just around a thousand :

	kANDas	*praSnas*	*anuvAkas*	*pancASat's*	*Words*
In the full yajur-*Veda*	7	44	651	2198	109287
Number elapsed upto the occurrence of *namah-SivAya*	3	23	340	1115	55769

9. Litanies of Thousand Names

A *sahasra-nAma* is a litany of one thousand names (of God). *sahasra* is one thousand and *nAma* is name. There are plenty of them, at least one for each particular divinity. The most well-known are the *Vishnu-sahasra-nAma* and the *Shiva-sahasra-nAma* (both occurring in the *mahA-bhArata)* and the *LalitA-sahasra-nAma* (occurring in the *BrahmANDa-purANa*.). Nowhere else in world literature do we have anything to match these long, 'streamlined' poems, densely packed with meaning and seemingly endless recitals of the Lord's names, glories and splendours, with no sacrifice of poetic elegance and grace. The rhythmic sound effects and the elevating moods that these *stotras* can produce must be heard and experienced to be believed. Every *sahasra-nAma* describes the Lord's infinite qualities in several ways and each description is only a fragmentary rendering of his *ananta kalyANa-guNa* (infinite number of auspicious attributes). It does not matter which *sahasra-nAma* we are looking at, whether of *Vishnu* or *Shiva* or the Goddess LalitA. Everywhere we see the same majesty of encyclopaedic exhaustiveness.

LalitA sahasra-nAma is famous for the internal organization of its text and the rhythmic sound vibrations it can produce.. Usually, in a *sahasranAma*, if the same name repeats, the commentators use their scholarship and inspiration to give different meanings to different occurrences of the same name. LalitA *sahasranAma* has the unique distinction, among all the *sahasranamas*, of not repeating even a single name. Further, in order to maintain the metre, *sahasranAmas* use the artifice of adding words like *tu, api, ca, hi*, - which are only conjunctions nnot necessarily needed for the meaning except in rare cases of interpretation. Lalita *sahasranAma* has again the unique distinction of not having even a single such innocuous word in its texture.

These extracts from the 'catalogues' of God's names are not meant to overwhelm the reader; they are given only to show that these *sahsra-nAmas* are not just directories or name lists compiled for the benefit of expectant mothers though they are often used for this purpose by parents. Each name has a profound significance in terms of the entire gamut of Hindu religion and philosophy. To recite these names is to be immersed in the wealth of their meanings and this is the surest way to concentrate on God and delight in ecstatic states of experience in His remembrance.

The *LalitA-sahasra-nAmA* and the *LalitA-triSatI* (= 300 names of *LalitA*) are the two most famous stotras of the Goddess. They were both taught by Hayagriva, Her foremost devotee, who was Himself *Vishnu* incarnate, to Agastya, the sage of all sages. The first one was originally recited by the *vAg-devatAs*, the goddesses of speech, right in the presence of Goddess *LalitA* Herself. The second one was originally composed by no less a divinity than Lord *Shiva* and Parvati, taking turns.

The *Vishnu-sahasra-nAma* was taught by Bhishma to Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas. The *bhAghavataM* says that there are only twelve men in the whole world who know the ins and outs of Dharma in all its subtlety. These twelve are: BrahmA, the Creator; Narada, the roving sage; Lord *Shiva*; Lord SubrahmaNya; the sage Kapila; Manu

the law-giver; the boy-devotee Prahlada; King Janaka; Bhishma; King Bali; the boy-sage Shuka, the reciter of the *BhA.*; and Yama, the Lord of Death and Dispenser of Justice:

svayambhUr-nAradas-SambhuH kumAraH kapilo manuH/
prahlAdo janako bhIshmo balir-vyAsakir-vayaM //

This is a statement by the God of Death himself to his assistants in the story of ajAmiLa as related in the *BhA.*. Thus Bhishma happens to be one of the twelve most knowledgeable people on *Dharma*. It was fitting therefore that when Yudhishtira, at the end of the mahA-bhArata war wanted to know all the subtleties of all the different types of *Dharma*, he was asked to go to Bhishma by Lord Krishna Himself. After all the *Dharmas* (of Kings, of persons, of women) had been talked about, finally Yudhishtira asks six fundamental questions:

- *What is the One Supreme God?*
- *What is the One Ultimate Resort?*
- *What is the One by worshipping which man can attainin everything that is good for him?*
- *What is the One whose praise by man will give him everything that is good for him?*
- *What Dharma is considered to be the greatest of all Dharmas?*
- *What is the One by the memory of which man may be released from the cycle of births and deaths?*

To all these questions Bhishma answers by quoting the *Vishnu-sahasra-nAma* (to be shortly referred to as V.S.) as the ultimate answer and so he recites the V.S. to Yudhishtira. Bhishma says that either by meditating on these names or by reciting them or by doing prostrations to God using these names (*dhyAyan-stuvan-namasyamSca*) one obtains everything that has to be obtained.

In the southern parts of India whenever any collective religious worship is planned or intended one practice is to repeat the names from a *sahasra-nAma* and do flower offerings to either a temple deity or a specially invoked deity for this purpose. This is the most sanctified way in which these *sahasra-nAmas* are used. Each name is taken in the dative case, prefixed by *AUM* and suffixed by *NAMAH*: thus, *aum viSvasmai namah*; *aum vishNave namaH*, … and so on through all the names. This simply means, Prostrations to *viSvam*, Prostrations to *Vishnu* and so on. The importance of aum for Hinduism is well known.This way all the names in the *sahasra-nA*ma are repeated to make up one thousand and eight prostrations in the form of flower offerings to the deity. Such a ritual *pUjA* is called a *sahasra-nAma archanA*. This method of worship is very popular both at home and in temples and public functions. A far more intensive version of this is for several people to sit together, perform the *arcanA* in chorus and finish in a prefixed time (usually several days, each day for a certain number of hours) one hundred such *sahasra-nAma arcanAs*, counting the number of *arcanAs* according to the multiplicity of people who joined in the chorus. This composite congregational programme is called a *lakshArcanA* (*laksha* = 100,000) since the recital of the different

people for the several days adds up to 100,000 repetitions of God's names. (Each *arcanA* has 1008 names but we do not count the extra eight). There are occasions when a *koTi arcanA* is also performed to the deity by counting up to 100 lakshArcanAs (*koTi* is 100 lakshas, that is, ten million). **Such massive repetitions of God's names has been one of the soundest traditions that have kept up the torch of spiritual fervour alive through the ages.**

10. Each Name a Capsule of Divinity

Every name that occurs in these *sahasr-nAmas* reverberate the concept of Divinity, or a glory of His, or an Action of His in the mythological yore, or a facet of His greatness. All the names below are from the V.S.. He is

anAdiH beginningless, because he is the Cause of everything. And He owes Himself no Cause. Compare His own statement in the *Gita* (10 - 13): Whoever knows me as unborn and beginningless and as the Lord of the Universe, he is the one among men without delusion and he is absolved of all sins::

yo mAm ajam anAdim ca vetti loka-maheSvaram /
asammUDhas-sa martyeshu sarva-pApaiH pramucyate //

Compare also '*brahmaNyo brahmakRt BrahmA brahma brahma-vivardhanaH'* in the *V.S.* itself. The two names *BrahmA* and *brahma* denote that He is the creator-cause of everything but He himself has no cause, because He is *Brahman* itself.

hariH, because the word *har* means to destroiy. He destroys *samsAra* as well as sins of man. He carries awy the sins of even evil-minded people.

mArgaH, the path, because there is no other path towards Him. Compare, *purusha sUkta*: *na anyaH panthA ayanAya vidyate*

sadgatiH, the one obtained by those who understand the truth that Brahman exists as the only reality: (T.U., II - 6 - 1):*asti brahmeti ced veda; santam enam tato viduh* , meaning, ‘If one knows that Brahman is, then they regard him as being.

kathithaH, that is, the One who is spoken of. *'He is the One who has been declared as the One by all the vedas*'; *'He is the One to be known by all the Vedas'*:

Ka.U. I - 2 - 15: *sarve vedA yat padam Amananti //*
B.G., 15 - 15: *vedaiSca sarvair-ahm-eva vedyaH //*

sambhavaH, the One who, according to his promise in the *Gita*, manifests Himself by His own free will and for the good of the world and in the manner He chooses (B.G.: 4 – 8):*Dharma-samsthApanArthAya sambhavAmi yuge yuge.*

svayambhUH the One who appears, manifests, 'is born', totally independent of anything else -- all by Himself. Even when He was 'born' as an infant in the *Avataras* of Rama and

Krishna, he was 'born' independent of any genetics or biology!. He just appeared, that was all.

kRtajnaH. He knows what was done. Whatever man does, He knows. But even a little devotion, a little good deed, is remembered by Him and man is rewarded accordingly. In the *mahAbhArata*, in Udyoga parva, he laments with regret the delay He made in going to the help of Draupadi when she was most in distress. It is to be noted here that He did not go to her help until she cried 'O Govinda, help me'. *'Even the vilest sinner, if He remembers me with sincerity, I will consider Him to be noble because He has taken the forward step'* says He in Ch.9 of the *Gita* 9 - 30:

api cet sudurAcAro bhajate mAM ananya-bhAk /
sAdhureva sa mantavyaH samyag- vyavasito hi saH //

Even the offering of leaves, fruits or flowers is acceptable to Him provided it is done with an intensity of feeling of devotion: *Gita* 9 - 26:

patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyA prayacchati /
tad-aham bhakty-upahRtam aSnAmi prayatAtmanaH //

In the Avatara of Rama there is a classical example of this in the description of Rama's characterisitics: (V.R. 2 - 1 - 11): He (Rama) felt gratified (even) with a single good turn casually rendered and did not take to heart (even) a hundred wrongs because of his mastery over his self:

kadA cid-upakareNa kRtenaikena tushyati/
na smaraty-apakArANAm Shatam-apy-AtmavattayA //

kRtAkRtaH. *kRtam* means that which is articificially made to happen. *akRtam* means that which happens without any action, that is, that which is natural. He is both the (*kArya*) Effect (which has an antecedent cause) and the (*kAraNa*) Cause (which has no antecedent cause). Again, He is both the effect in the form of works done and the cause in the form of works which are only latent. He has a *kRta* form, which comes and goes and He has an *akRta* form which is subtle, which has no perceptible qualities. In other words He is both the concrete and the subtle. Also He has two facets of *Dharma* both inherent inHim, namely, that which gives a temporal spatial benefit (this is *kRta*) and that which has a permanent immutable benefit (this is *akRta*).

Each name of God is interpreted as indicative of a certain quality of His, perhaps the name itself has arisen because of that quality or attribute in Him. He is eternal, ***ShASvataH***. He is auspicious, ***ShivaH***; never-changing, acyuta. All beings are drawn to Him as the originator, hence He is ***Adi-devaH.*** He revels in the great knowledge of the *Atman*, ignoring all trifles - hence He is ***mahA-devaH.*** Great are His activities of creation, etc.; therefore He is ***mahA-karmA***. By His brilliance, the Sun derives its brilliance, so He is ***mahA-tejaH***. He deserves praise by all, but none has to be praised by Him; so He is ***stavyaH***. He is one who delights in praise, so He is ***stava-priyaH***. Praise is

uttering the divine qualities, that is God Himself, so He is also that by which He is praised - ***stotram***. And He who praises is also Himself, so He is ***stotA***.

Not only is the Lord living in each one of us as its innermost resident, but, He is, at once, the all-pervading essence in which the entire universe exists and, as such, He alone is the abode in which we live, breathe and act. He is the abode, therefore, ***vatsaraH***. He is also ***vatsalaH***, the supremely affectionate, who loves His devotees deeply. His love for all of us is greater by far than all the maternal and paternal love we have ever enjoyed -- He is Supreme Love, ***vatsala***. All living things are His children and He is the father of them all, therefore He is ***vatsI***.

He is ***kAlaH***, one who measures the merits and demerits of each individual and apportions the appropriate results. *I am the time of recokoning* - says the Lord in the *Gita*: *kAlo'smi.* He is *kAlaH* also because He is the death or annihilator of all His enemies, the misdirected sense organs.

He is ***ugraH***, the terrible, that is, the one who instils fear in those who are diabolically evil. The Upanishad declares

bhIshAsmAd-vAtah pavate / bhIsho'deti sUryaH /
bhIshAsmAd-agniScendraSca //

'For fear of Him the Wind blows, the Sun shines,
the fire burns and Indra rules':

He is also ***manoharaH,*** the one who plunders the mind; the charming one; He is beauty incarnate; He compels the attention of the devotee, drawing it away from all other sense objects to dwell upon His enchanting form. Recall the story of Dhanurdasa being charmed away from his ladylove, on seeing the infinitely winning personality of the reclining *Vishnu* of Srirangam.

He is ***udbhavaH***, because He is the (material) cause for the origin of the universe. *'I am the origin of everything; It is from me everything appears'* says the Lord in the *B.G.10-8:*

aham sarvasya prabhavao mattas-sarvam pravartate

But though He has brought about the whole universe, this action does not in any way bind Him. For He says in the *B.G. 9-9*: These actions do not bind me; I am untouched by the actions, I sit, as it were, totally indifferent to them:

na ca mAm tAni karmANi nibadhnanti dhananjaya /
udAsInavad-AsInam asaktam teshu karmasu //

And therefore, say the commentators, He removes our bondage even as we meditate on Him.In fact we may even meditate on Him as the little Krishna who was 'bound' by ropes by His mother!

He is ***pramodanaH****:* He revels in joy and bliss. *Moda* is carnal pleasure. *Pramoda* is spiritual bliss. He is full of *pramoda*. Therefore he is ever blissful. He gives that bliss to those who meditate on Him. The very meditation itself gives bliss. That is why, in the *mantra* of the gAyatrI, the second line which says 'let us meditate on the Glory of the Absolute' stands for the Ananda of the three representations *sat*, *cit*, *Ananda* of the Ultimate Reality.

He is ***guhyaH***: He is himself a secret. He can be known only by the *mantras* and messages of the upanishads. Also he dwells subtly in the innermost cave of the heart:

yo veda nihitam guhAyAm parame vyoman / so'Snute sarvAn kAmAn saha //

in the *T.U.*, meaning: *He who knows it as resident of the subtle space in the secret cave (of the heart) experiences all his desires.* Also in the M.N.U.,

dahram vipApam vara-veSma-bhUtam yat-puNDarIkam pura-madhya-saMstham /
tatrApi dahram gaganam viSokas-tasmin yad-antas-tad-upAsitavyam //

He is ***priyakRt*** - He does for us what is pleasing to us. We may worship Him just for our own petty wishes. He fulfills them so that we may finally want what He is always ready to give us, namely *moksha.*

He is ***gahanaH***- so profound that He is unfathomable. You cannot scale the depth of the Truth that is He.

He is **avyayaH**, imperishable. Recall B.G. 7 - 25: mUDho'yam nAbhijAnati loko mAm ajam avyayam / that is, 'this foolish world does not know Me as unborn and imperishable'. Also *B.G.* 9 - 18: '*nidhAnam bIjam avyayam'.* The epithet '*avyayam bIjam'* here is of significance. He is the seed from which everything sprouts but the seed itself never vanishes. A most unique seed indeed! Note that the seed can never vanish because when everything perishes the seed itself is necessary for the re-creation of the Universe. Vyaya also means change. There are six changes for any object: (*asti* =) appears; (*jAyate* =) is born; (*vardhate* =) grows; (*pariNamate* =) undergoes modification; (*apakshIyate* =) decays; (*naSyati* =) dies, vanishes, disappears. None of these changes apply to the Lord. And more, it is only of Him that such a statement can be said. Everything else will have at least one of these changes. What is not may appear; what was not there is born; what is born may have default and it will grow; what grows may decay; what grows or decays certainly undergoes modification; what is born finally dies and what appears also disappears. All these are the effects of the play of the *guNas*. The only subject that transcends the *guNas* is the lord. That is why the *Gita* says, in 7 - 13:

tribhir-guNa-mayair-bhAvair-ebiH sarvam-idam jagat /
mohitam nAbhijAnAti mAm ebhyaH param avyayam //
This entire universe is deluded into action by the three attitudes of the *guNas*,
but it is not aware of Me who is unchanging and unaffected by any of these.

He is ***aprameyaH***, immeasurable, not reachable by any rules of logic. The Ke.U. says: That which man does not comprehend with the mind, that by which they say the mind is encompassed, know that to be *Brahman*, not what people worship as an object. (I - 6):

yan-manasA na manute yenAhur-mano matam / tadeva brahmatvam viddhi nedam yadidam upAsate //

Also B.G. 2 - 1: 'anASino'prameyasya'

He is ***adhAtA***, not propped up or supported by anything else; He needs no support. He is his own support. Recall from *tirukkuraL* :

paRRuga paRRaRRAn paRRinai appaRRaip-paRRuga paRRu viDarku.
Hold on to the One who has no attachment.
By attaching yourself to the attachmentless, you will be rid of attachments.

He is ***anuttamaH,*** unexcelled. More supreme than He there is nothing more supreme, nothing larger, nothing smaller: (*M.N.U.*):

yasmAt param nAparmasti kimcid-yasmAn-nANIyo na jyAyo'sti kimcit //

Also the *B.G.*7 - 7: There is nothing more supreme than Myself, O Arjuna.
mattah paratarm nAnyat kimcidasti dhananjaya //

He is ***agrAhyaH***, He cannot be sensed by the senses. This is one of the classical ways in which the Absolute is described in the Upanishads by all negatives. Ma.U. , says, for instance: '*adRshTam*, not visible; *avyavahAryam*, not relatable; *agrAhyam,* not sensed by the senses, *alakshaNam*, not definable; *acintyam* , not imaginable; *avyapadeSyam,* not indicatable.'

He is ***bhUtakRt***, He produced all beings. Not only He produced, He sustains them, and He takes them back. These three actions are all there in that one epithet *kRt.* The *mAyA Shakti* through which He acts, has three strands - the *rajo- guNa* causes the production, the *satva- guNa* causes the sustenance and the *tamo-guNa* causes the dissolution. Cf. B.G. 9 - 7

sarva-bhUtAni kaunteya prakRtim yAnti mAmikAm /
kalpa-kshaye punastAni kalpAdau visRjAmy-aham //

Therefore He is also ***bhUtabRt***. The one who supports all beings. But on that account He is not to be considered as one of the beings. *cf. B.G.* 9 - 5*: bhUtabRn-na ca bhUtastho* ...

He is ***AtmavAn***, meaning, simply, the one who is His own Self. But this does not say all. In the *ChAndogya* upanishad, the question is raised: *What supports Him?* The answer is given. *In His own Self*. *sa bhagavan kasmin pratishTita iti sve mahimni.* The Supreme Divinity does not need anything else for its support for there is nothing else other than Itself. So it is based on its own Self. So He is the only *AtmavAn*, no other entity can have this epithet. That is why we are asked to enjoy by renouncing the world - *tena tyaktena*

bhunjIta in Isopanishad. When you have renounced everything else, only the Self, full of bliss, remains. This is the state of being the one who is His own Self. It is interesting to note that among the sixteen questions which Valmiki asks Narada before He wrote the Ramayana this is one: *Who is the AtmavAn*? The answer comes *it is Rama*.

So He it is that is established in Own Self. Therefore He is also the 'established' - ***pratishTitaH***.

The beauty of these *sahasra-nAmas* also lies in the fact that nowhere else do the scriptures convince us so dramatically that God possesses both the opposites of the same quality or attribute. Contrary attributes being assigned to God is certainly in tune with the Upanishadic descriptions of the Absolute in terms of opposite superlative extremes like smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest, etc.: *aNor-aNIyAn-mahato mahIyAn.*

Tricky names and trickier meanings are what makes the *sahasra-nAmas* what they are. They are at the same time texts for recitation as prayers and also storehouses for information to be leisurely digested during meditation.

He is both Existence - ***sat*** - and Non-Existence - ***asat*** -. Existence, because He is the One that exists in all things and beings; Non-existence, because He is the conditioned and limited plurality of the universe which is manifest to us but has no ultimate reality. Recall the words of the Lord in the *B.G.* 9 - 19: *sad-asac-cAham arjuna.*

He is the changeless core amidst all changes, but He appears as changing just as the ocean appears as the changing and dying waves. He is therefore at the same time the perishing superposition as well as the imperishable substratum -- ***ksharaH*** as well as ***aksharaH***

He is ***ekaH,*** one, because there is no second. He is also ***naikaH***, that is, not one, because He is the One immanent in all the plurality of the visible universe. Recall Rg-veda (1-164-46):

'ekam sad-viprA bahudhA vadanti'
The one Truth, Wise men speak of in varied ways.

Also recall Ka.U. (2 - 2 -9): Just as fire, though one, having entered the world, assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes, similarly, the Self inside all beings, though one assumes a form in respect of each shape; and yet, it is outside:

agnir-yathaiko bhuvanam pratishTo rUpam rUpam pratirUpo babhUva /
ekastathA sarva-bhUtAntarAtmA rUpam rUpam pratirUpo bahiSca //

Again, Ch.U.: (6 - 2 - 1): Brahman is one, one only, without a second. (*ekam-evAdvitIyam brahma)*

He is ***aNuh,*** atomic; ***bRhat,*** macrocosmic; ***kRSaH***, lean; ***sthUlaH***, fat; ***guNabrt,*** full of attributes; ***nirguNaH***, attributeless; ***mahAn***, great; ***adhRtaH***, supportless. These names

occur in continuous succession that *parASara*, one of the great commentators on the *Vishnu sahasra-nAma*, excels here by interpreting these eight names as describing the eight powers of yoga: namely, *aNimA, mahimA, laghumA, garimA, Isitva, vaSitva, prAkAmya* and *prApti* -- meaning, the powers to become atomic, transcendent, light, heavy, the power to will anything beyond any natural phenomenon, effortless attainment of anything and omniscience coupled with omnipotence! This is a gem from *parASara.*

annam annAda eva ca: Here there are two words ***annam*** and ***annAdaH***. *annam* is food; *annAda* is eater of food. How can He be both? Clearly He is the eater of food, because it is He that resides in this body and gives the doership and enjoyership to the individual soul. But food is inert; it is part of the universe. It is a creation of God. But it is identified with God here. The definition of food and the derivation of the name *annam* to food is lucidly explained in T.U.*:*

annAd-bhUtAni jAyante; jAtAny-annena vardhante;
adyate'tti ca bhUtAni; tasmAd-annam tad-ucyata iti //

> meaning, *From food all living beings are born; those that are born are reared and nurtured by food; food is consumed (= adyate) by living beings and food itself consumes (= atti); therefore what is eaten is called annam*. The active and the passive senses in both of which the verb '*ad*', *to eat*, is used is to emphasize that the Ultimate Supreme*, Brahman*, is the inherent being in individual bodies and therefore is the consumer of food, and the same *Brahman*, as the material cause, through *prakRti*, beomes the food and therefore food itself is the consumer.

Interpretation of eva ca: *eva* means 'only' and *ca* is the connective article 'and'. One may be tempted to say that these two words are there for completion of metre in the verse. It is not so. The 'only' denotes non-difference between the entities denoted by the names *annam* and *annAda*; and the word 'and' denotes the (undeniable) phenomenal difference between the two entities. It is interesting to note that the only other place where the word combination *'eva ca'* is used in the *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* is also in the same context and connotation.

There are several names of the Lord which contain a whole mythological event within the name. One such name is ***madhu-sUdanaH***. The story is pretty complicated. We extract it from *devI-BhA*. chapter 1. After each deluge, the next morning (of the Cosmic Day of Brahma) the Creator has to create from scratch. At the beginning of one such morning, two demons arose from the dirt of the Lord's ear (who was just rising up from His Cosmic yogic sleep) and from the *tamo-guNa* which was the first thing that emanated from the creator. These demons were *madhu* and *kaiTabha*. The creator caused the first sound vibration of *AUM* and from that the vedas arose. But the two demons took away the vedas and made them inaccessible. The Lord took the manifestation as *haya-grIva* and brought the vedas back. The demons were furious and began to shake up the very foundations of the divine lotus stalk which was the seat of the Creator from which He was to start His work of creation. So the Lord decided to do away with the two demons who were nothing but *tamo-guNa* personified. The Lord promised to give them whatever they wanted. They were arrogant enough to throw back the same question of the Lord: What boon do you want from us? The Lord now replied: I want your death! They replied very 'cleverly', 'yes, you can destroy us, provided you do it in sky uncovered by cloth'!

The Lord removed the cloth covering His thighs, put them on his lap and destroyed them. It is important to note here that in the Lord's Cosmic Form, His feet are the Earth and His thighs are the space of the sky. (cf. *bhUh pAdau yasya nAbhir viyat …*) So His act of removing the cloth from His thighs fulfilled the demons' requirement of a sky uncovered by cloth. What they thought would not happen did happen by the Lord's strategy. This is the *lIlA* of the Lord to kill the two *asuras madhu* and *kaitabha*. Therefore He is *madhu-sUdanaH*.

Now we shall take a few names from the lalitA sahasra-nAma. ***lalitA,*** the Mother Goddess, is *dear to devotees* because of their devotion, so She is ***bhakti-priyA***. She is also ***bhakti-gamyA***, because she is *attainable through bhakti* alone. She is ***bayApahA*** since She *removes* all *fears*. She is ***bhakti-vaSyA***, since She is *bound by bhakti*. She is ***niranjanA***, *faultless*; ***nirlepA***, *attachmentless*; ***nirmalA***, *blemishless*; ***nityA***, *permanent;* ***nirAkArA***, *formless*; ***nirAkulA***, *delusionless* and therefore not reachable by those who are deluded. She is ***nirbhavA***, *one without birth and death*, and for this very reason, She is ***bhava-nASinI***, *one who destroys the disease of birth and death.*

To understand the profound significance of many of these epithets of the Almighty, one has to get acquainted with the deeper parts of Hinduism, namely the wisdom taught by the Upanishads. She is ***antar-mukha-samArAdhyA,*** one who is to be *worshipped by turning inward*. She is ***bahir-mukha-sudurlabhA***, *unattainable, if you search for Her outside*. She is *devoid of name and form*, so ***nAma-rUpa-vivarjitA***. She is *pleased by the recitation of Her names,* so ***nAma-pArAyaNa-prItA.*** She is the *One Person to be known by all the vedas*, therefore ***veda-vedyA***. She is the *original source of the vedas*, therefore ***veda-jananI.*** She is the one who *is pointed out by the word 'that' in all the scriptures,* so She is ***tat-pada-lakshyArthA.*** She is the original Energy that first sprouted from the formless *Brahman*, therefore, ***Adi-Shakti.*** She is immeasurable, either by the senses or the mind, therefore, ***ameyA***.

11. Each Name a Scriptural Epitome

The very first name with which the *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* begins is ***viSvam,*** meaning Universe. This visible universe is indicated by the word *viSvam.* It is a noun in the neuter gender. But this is itself cited as one of the names of the lord. This itself reflects the grand panorama of the Upanishads which declare that the Ultimate transcends all gender specification and so denote it by 'IT'. But if we still use the masculine gender it is only because of our habits and *vAsanAs*! The universe was created by Him and so He is the Cause of it. In Vedanta the Cause pervades the Effect. Without a Cause there is no Effect. Wherever there is an Effect, there must be a Cause. Therefore, the Effect, the Universe here, is given the status of representing the Cause itself and is given as an alternative name for the Cause. The conclusion of the *advaita* school of Vedanta is that there is no difference between the Cause and its Effect. The Effect is taken to be the manifestation of the Cause. The very fact that the Universe is there shows that there is a Cause. In other words that God exists is proved by the very existence of the universe. Not only does the universe spring from Him, the ultimate Cause, but when the time comes for dissolution

everything dissolves in Him. He has created the Unvierse and He has entered it, says the *T.U.*: *tat sRSTvA, tadevAnuprAviSat.*

Therefore *viSvam*, the Universe, has God immanent in it. The root verb is *viS*, to enter. God has 'entered' into his creation, as it were. The concept of 'entering' seems to imply that there are two objects, one entering into the other. This connotation of the word is not valid for the present situation, because it would result in the Universe being a different category from the Almighty - a difference not accepted at least by the major schools *advaita* and *viSishTAdvaita*.

For more on this 'difference' see the Subsection on
'Difference and Non-Difference' in the chapter 'Absolute as it is'.

In the *Gita* also the Lord declares (13 – 12, 13):

> *'I will tell you what is that knowledge, learning which, one attains immortality. Brahman is ever present and everywhere present. He has hands and feet everywhere. He has eyes and heads everywhere. He stands as a colossus, as it were, spanning everything.'*:

> *jneyam yat tat pravkshyAmi yaj-jnAtvA amRtam-aSnute / ...sarvataH pANi-pAdam tat sarvatokshi Siro-mukham / sarvatas-Shrutimalloke sarvamAvrtya tishTati //*

This reflects, again, the refrain from the upanishads. For instance, we have, in Mu.U. 2 - 2 - 11,

> *Brahman, verily, is this Immortal. In front is Brahman, behind is Brahman, to the right and to the left. It spreads forth below and above. Brahman, indeed, is this universe. It is the greatest.:*

> *brahmaivedam-amRtam purastAt brahma paScAt,*
> *brahma dakshiNaS-cottareNa /*
> *adaS-cordhvam ca prasRtam*
> *brahmai-vedam viSvam-idam varishTam //*

The second name is **VishnuH**. Though the name *Vishnu* is commonly taken to denote the second God of the Trinity, responsible for the function of protecting and sustaining the Universe and its beings, it has a more profound meaning which transcends the legends associated with it in mythology. The word comes from the root verb *vyApnoti* - meaning, pervades. He pervades the fibre of every being. He pervades everything that you know of or can think of. Not only He pervades everything but He transcends them. The *purusha sUkta* of the vedas says:

> *sa bhUmim viSvato vRtvA; atyatishTat dasAngulam /*

meaning: *He pervaded all the Earth and the Universe and then exceeded it by ten inches*. Symbolically it means that He transcends everything. Thus the first two names *viSvam*

and *Vishnuh* of the *Vishnu*-sahsranaMa take care of the 'I" and 'T' (that is, immanence and transcendence) of the TIP of the Iceberg, that is God.

The derivation of words from their root syllables, in the Sanskrit language is a very fascinating and instructive exercise and the fact that Hindu literature is replete with such derivations for almost every word that it uses is fully illustrated in these *sahsra-nAmas*. These poems are thus veritable storehouses of religious information, capsule versions of the whole spectrum of Hindu philosophy, metaphysics and mythology. Take two simple words, *purushaH* (meaning, 'person') - in the *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* - and *umA* (a name of Goddess *pArvati)* - in the *LalitA sahasra-nAma*.

purushaH is such an innocent-looking word, meaning a 'person' in the masculine gender. To take this as one of the 'names' of God looks childish. But there is much to it, if you get into the Sanskrit root words from which the word *purushaH* has evolved etymologically. The words *pUh* and *pura* both mean city, abode, dwelling. This body is called a city of nine gates: cf *B.G.* 5 - 13: *navadvAre pure dehI* (= *in the city of nine openings, this resident of the body*).

puri Sete iti purushah:

purusha is one who resides, dwells, relaxes, in the city (of nine gates) . A vedic passage says:

devAnAm pUr-ayodhyA

meaning thereby that this body is the dwelling place of several divinities. The body is called *ayodhyA* here. The resident of *ayodhyA* that is, Rama, is the indwelling *purusha* here. So *purusha* connotes the indweller in this body, that is, the Supreme Almighty. Again another vedic passage gives the derivation: *He who was here all the time, before anybody else, is the purusha* -- (*taittirIya AraNyakam* 1-13):

pUrvam eva aham iha Asam iti; tat purushasya purushatvam

There is a corresponding passage in Tamil devotional literature meaning, the thing that is older than the oldest:

munnaip-pazham porutkum munnaip-pazham poruL.

There are other connotations like: *He lives in those things which are exalted, noble*: (*puru* means something great, majestic, noble): *purushu sIdati iti purushah.* Also *he who gives in abundance*: *purUNi sanoti iti purushah*. Also, again, *puru sanoti iti purushah* - meaning, *The distributed reward is Himself, the great, as the fruit of our actions*. Again, *he fills up everything* (*pUrayati*) and *occupies everything* (*sIdati*), therefore *purushah*. Again, *purati,* that is, *agre gacchati -- He enters the body before other things like prANa*, *vital air, enters.* These are only a few of the several connotations that the one word *purusha* has.

The simple name ***umA*** has as its constituents, three syllables: *u, ma* and *a.* The same three syllables in a different order, though, constitute the most important *mantra* of Hindu philosophy, AUM. So everything that is connoted by AUM, that is, what all the scriptures say in essence, (= *sarve vedA yat-padam Amananti*), is also indicated by the word *umA*. Further *u* means *Shiva*, the nature of *Shiva* is the unmanifested *Brahman*, and it is the *prakRti*, the inherent characteristic of *Brahman* that works the delimitation of that unlimited *Brahman* for us to bring it into our mind and worship. Thus *umA* delimits *Brahman* and brings Him to us.:

ukAra-rUpam BrahmANam mAti iti umA //

mAti means delimits, circumscribes, concretises. Another meaning for *umA* is, the One, who was prevented. This refers to the situation where *pArvati* wanted to do penance of the severest kind, and her mother beckoned to her, with the monosyllable *u,* and said, *mA*. (*mA* in Sanskrit stands for No). It is in the form and name of *umA* that the Mother of the Unvierse appears to Indra, the Lord of the divines, in Kenopanishad, as the comprehensible manifestation of the incomprehensible Supreme. There are other esoteric meanings which resonate the embedding of mythology, cultural history and philosophy into the words, even as simple as *umA.*

He is **cchinna-samSayaH**; He has no doubts of any kind, but more, He removes all our doubts by His very Graceful look. That is why it is said: *What a wonderfulful scene under the banyan tree! The disciples are old, the guru is young; the guru is silent; but the silence itself is eloquent; and the disciples are rid of all their doubts*!'

citram vaTa taror-mUle vRddhAs-sishyA gurur-yuvA /
gurostu maunam vyAkhyAnam sishyAstu cchinnasamSayAh //

The M.U. says in 2 - 2 - 8:

When that Self, which is both the high and the low, is realized, the knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved and all one's actions become dissipated:

bhidyate hRdaya-granthiH chidyante sarva-samSayAh /
kshIyante cAsya karmANi tasmin dRshTe parAvare //

He is the ***karaNaM***, instrument or the means of action; as well as the ***kAraNam*M,** the cause of action; that is, He is the most extraordinary cause for the origination of the universe; He is also the ***kartA***, the agent of every action, the free master. The Lord is all three. When we say that He is the Cause, we mean that He is both the material (= *upAdAna-kAraNa*) and the efficient cause (*nimitta-kAraNa*) - this is also referred to as the instrumental cause. When a potter makes a pot out of clay, the clay is the material cause and the potter is the efficient cause. As far as creation of the universe is concerned, that God is the efficient cause, that He is the Agent of Action, all religions agree. But Hindu philosophy, at least the *advaita* and *viSishTAdvaita* schools of philosophy, maintain that He is also the material cause. In other words He made the world out of Himself. That is

why, the universe, *viSvam* -- the first name in *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* - is also one of His names.

In fact there are two more names in *Vishnu-sahasra-nAma* itself which clinch the issue. ***Atma-yoniH svayam-jAtaH***: The first one means that everything was born out of Himself, so He is the material cause of the universe. The second one means that He brought forth the universe at His own prodding, not due to any other agency and so He is also the efficient cause of creation.

He is ***ekAtmA***, the *AtmA* which is one and one only. Recall A.U.I-1-1:

> In the beginning this was but the Absolute Self alone, There was nothing else whatsoever than winked.-
> *AtmA vA idam eka eva agra AsIt / nAnyat kimcana mishat /*

Also Sv.U.: 6 -11:

> It is the single Divinity that resides hidden in all beings.
> *eko devas-sarva-bhUteshu gUdhas*h … /

The above names are from the *V.S.*. The name ***AtmA*** occurs in the *LalitA-sahasranAma*. The simple meaning that it is the individual soul does not do full justice to it. Certainly it is the *parA-Shakti* of the Absolute that has sparked within this body that makes it tick. *Gita* 7- 5:

> *jIva-bhUtAm mahaAbAho yayedam dhAryate jagat /*

The word itself is pregnant with meaning: *Living in this body and known as the individual soul, it 'reaches' (= Apnoti) the sensed objects, it 'possesses' them (= Adatte), it 'experiences' them (=atti), and finally it 'exists' (asti) in some form or other.*

> *yaccApnoti yadAdatte yaccAtti vishayAniha /*
> *yaccAsya santato bhAvah tasmAdAtmeti gIyate //*

***nishkriyA*:** (This is a name from *lalitA sahasra-nAma*). She is devoid of all Action. An individual is born in accordance with his previous *karma*. In order that he may not accrue further *karma* which may land him in further rounds of birth and death, the scriptures prescribe various do's and don'ts. But man ignores these commands and goes his own way. He gets into the vortex of *samsAra* more deeply -- all because of Ignorance of his true nature and of the purpose for which He was brought into existence. Thus a soul which is bound by *samsAra* is involved in the Actions of the world. But not so the supreme Self. It has no bondage and no Action involvement. But now the question arises. We are also told that it is the Divine Self which is in us that prods us on to think, work and act. Is this not an action on the part of the Mother Goddess? No. She is not 'making' us act and work. We act in Her presence. Under the street lamp, a transaction takes place. Without the presence of the street lamp that transaction will not take place. But the street lamp has no responsibility for the Action. You cannot ascribe the action to the street lamp. In the presence of electricity the electric fan rotates. In the absence of electricity

the fan will not rotate. For that reason we have ascribed the action of rotation to the electric current. Light has no responsibility for the knowledge of things present in the room. But by the presence of Light we get the knowledge of the things present. Light does not do any work to bring us the knowledge of the contents of the room. A sweet smell pervades the atmosphere. Our mind is excited about it. But the sweet perfume has not done any action. That is why the *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* also includes the name: ***sAkshI,*** witness. He is only the witness. In His presence things move, vibrate, mind thinks, action takes place.

kshetrajno'kshara eva ca The two names involved here are: ***kshetrajnaH*** and ***aksharaH,*** *kshetra* is the field, body or inert nature. Kshetrajna is the one who cognises the *kshetra*; it is the knower. *I am the knower in all the bodies*, says the Lord in the beginning of the 13th chapter:

kshetrajnam cApi mAm viddhi sarva-kshetreshu bhArata /

Actually there are different levels of knowing. What the ordinary man thinks of himself as the knower and the enjoyer is called the 'perishable purusha' (*kshara purusha)* in the *Gita*. This is the reflection of the supreme Self in the individual mind. This is referred to as '*kshetrajna*' . It is also called the *jIva* or the individual soul. It is the mysterious identification of the 'I' with the body and the senses (called *the knot between spirit and matter* -- *chit-jada-granthi* -- by Ramana maharishi) that brings about the individuality and the status as the knower and the experiencer. He it is that enjoys and suffers, he it is that is subject to pleasure and pain and he it is that thinks he is the doer and experiencer. He is the soul manifest in Nature and bound up with its action. He is under the constant spell of *mAyA*. But deep within there is another who is unaffected by the turmoils of the outer personality and he is called the 'imperishable purusha' (*akshara purusha*). He is the changeless non-participating 'witness' (= *sAkshI*) to everything. He is the silent, immutable all-pervading motionless self-existent Self. It is the Lord that appears as the two *purushas*. The identification between these two that is implied by this statement of the *vishnu sahasra-nAma* is nothing but the classic upanishadic identification of the *JIvAtmA* (= the Self in the individual) and the *ParamAtmA* (the Supreme Self) . Here also the two words *eva* and *ca* have the same connotation as that explained in connection with annam-annAda eva ca, namely, *eva* stands for non-difference between *JIvAtmA* and *paramAtmA* and *ca* indicates the phenomenal difference between the two.

The two major commentaries on *V.S.*, one by Shankara following the *advaita* school of thought and the other by *ParASara*, following the *viSishTAdvaita* school are unique in their own way in creating meanings for the different names. Except in the case of a few names, we have been mostly following Shankara's commentary. *ParASara* however has the unique honour of considering the whole work of *Vishnu sahasra-nAma* as a continuous logical development of the five major esoteric principles of the concept of God in the *viSishTAdvaita* philosophy. These are:

- *para* - transcendence par excellence
- *VyUha* - the glory of the abode of Lord *Vishnu*
- *vibhava* - the majesty and the miraculous nature of the Avataras

- *antaryAmi* - the immanent aspect of God
- *arcA* - the manifestation as temple deities

So the names are interpreted according to the division in which they fall in the dissection of the *sahasra-nAma* into the above five principles and further division of them into other sub-categories. For instance, the first 122 names, according to *ParASara,* describe the transcendent form of God. And the last eight names (contained in the very last verse of *V.S.*, namely,

SankhabRn-nandakI cakrI Sarnga-dhanvA gadAdharaH /
rathAngapAnir-akshobhyaH sarva-praharaNAyudhaH //

describe the beautiful Form of *Vishnu* with his conch, disc, mace, etc. In this process of division *ParASara* brings the ten *Avataras* of *Vishnu* naturally in his third major division of the *sahasra-nAma*. It is here that he shows the names are related to, for instance, the Rama and Krishna *Avataras*. Even the apparently endless amount of electronic space available on the web, does not help us to bring all this profound matter matter on the web, purely for want of time and necessary effort of ours.

On the other hand, the following two verses from the *vishnu sahasra-nAma* have been held by experts of the bygone age, to bring out the secret of the *Avataras* of Rama and Krishna respectively. I wonder whether this fact is stated anywhere in print or in manuscript. The verses are:

sarva-darSI vimuktAtmA sarvajno jnAnam-uttamam /
suvratas-sumukhas-sUkshmah sughoshas-sukhadas-suhRt//
atIndriyo mahAmAyo mahotsAho mahAbalah/
mahAbuddhir-mahAviryo mahAShaktir-mahAdyutih //

To sum up, each name of God points to several concepts and ideas, not only those enshrined in the scriptures but scores of other philosophical and esoteric connotations that they suggest without actually spelling them out. The twelve names of God that are frequently used in the rituals and ceremonies and which are very common as names given for Hindu children have themselves profound meanings. For instance,

He is ***keSavaH*** -- which simply means one who has beautiful locks of hair. In the incarnation as Krishna, even as he was born, the description of the child makes special mention of the dense locks of hair through which the gems of the ornaments in the ears and the crown sparkle: (*Srimad BhA.*: 10 -3):

mahArha-vaiDUrya-kirITa-kuNDala-tvishA-parishvakta- sahasra-kuNDalam /

Another meaning: He killed the demon *keSi*, so He is called *keSava,* according to a statement of Narada in *the Vishnu purANa*. A third etymological meaning is more interesting. *KeSava* is broken into *kaH, aH, IsaH* - that is, (according to the dictionary meanings of these monosyllabic words) Brahma, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* - the three Lords of the Trinity. The word *keSava* then means He in whose control are the three Lords. In

other words *keSava* is the transcendental God Supreme, of whom the three Lords are specific manifestations.

There are fourteen *nAmas* (= names) of Lord *Vishnu* which are scripturally most sanctified and which are very often used for the most fundamental of all rituals, namely the *Acamanam,* are:

achyuta, ananta, keSava, Narayana, mAdhava, Govinda, Vishnu, madhusUdana, trivikrama, vAmana, SriIdhara, hRshIkeSa, padmanAbha, dAmodara.

All these names occur in the *Vishnu-sahasra-nAma*. In fact some of them occur more than once. And commentators wax eloquent in producing different derivations and meanings for the different occurrences of the same name. Of these we shall take up *Narayana* later.The names *keSava*, *Vishnu* and *madhu-sUdana* have already been discussed. The remaining ten are taken up below. These fourteen are made up of two sets of names, one consisting of three names and the other consisting of twelve names, with the proviso that one name (*Govinda*) occurs in both the sets.. The first set is made up of three names: ***achyuta, ananta*** and ***Govinda***. These three names are so purificatory that before every act of religious duty one recites *achyutAya namah, anantAya namaH* and *govindAya namaH* and sips a small drop of water after the recitation of each name and this ritual, being the first part of the *Acamanam*, is supposed to purify one spiritually. Without such an *Acamanam* no religious rite or ritual is begun and none is complete; more, at each stage of the ritual, on completion of one part of the ritual one does an *Acamanam* and on the beginning of the other part of the same ritual one does the *Acamanam;* so that during an elaborate ritual there are several occasions when one will be doing two *Acamanams* consecutively. The importance of the *Acamanam* for spiritual purification can never be overstated. The second part of the *Acamanam* consists of touching different parts of the body with specified fingers and movements of the right hand, saying as we go along, the remaining twelve names, namely, *keSava, Narayana, mAdhava, Govinda, Vishnu, madhusUdana, trivikrama, vAmana, SriIdhara, hRshIkeSa, padmanAbha, dAmodara*. These twelve *nAmas* have such a great sanctity that orthodox followers of vaishnavism put marks on twelve parts of the body with each mark representing one of these names and this practice became so ingrained in the culture that these marks came to be called '*nAmams*' in Tamil . It is significant to note that the famous *Avatara*-names, *Rama* and *Krishna* are <u>not</u> in these twelve. However, most of the names are also Krishna's names thus reverberating the general thought that Krishna's is a complete *Avatara*. The only *Avatara* referred to directly in these twelve names is the *vAmana* (= dwarf) incarnation in which the Lord after appearing as a dwarf later grows up in cosmic space to extend His feet to the three worlds of the universe and is therefore also referred to as *trivikrama*. (= the One who took three giant strides). This incarnation is mentioned in the vedas also very often.

The most important one of these twelve is *Govinda*. Already we have noted above that this name is common to the two fundamentally important sets of names. *Govinda* means the Lord of the Cows. *Go* means cow. That is why the lord is also called *gopAla* (the protector or sustainer of cows). Incidentally the name *gopAla* does not occur in the *vishnu sahasra-nAma* but the parallel word, *gopati*, having the same meaning, occurs. *Go* also

means the word of the vedas. He confers (*vindate*) the wisdom of the vedas on us, therefore *Govindah*. Also because He is known only by the word or *mantras* of the vedas. Go also means the Earth. In one of His cosmic manifestations (namely, *varAha-Avatara*, the incarnation as a giant boar) He recovered the Earth from the demon Hiranyaksha who had carried it away. So He is *GovindaH*. It is interesting to note that Adi Shankara chose this name of God to be used as the deity in his immortal poem *'bhaja Govindam'* which, within a short span of 30 verses comprises the whole of Hindu philosophy, mythology and metaphysics and is also one of the best devotional *stotras* that one can enjoy reciting. The folklore is that Shankara immortalised the name *Govinda* in his *stotra* because it was the name of his *guru*! The name *Govinda* occurs twice in the *sahasra-nAma*. A lecture on spiritual matters, particularly the ones which seek to cover a *purANa* or *Ramayana* or *mahA-bhArata* is usually preceded by a chorus recitation of the name *Govinda*, on the prompting of the speaker by the words: *sarvatra Govinda-nAma-samkIrtanam*. The pilgrims who visit the Tirupati temple of the Lord always raise the cry of *govindA, govindA* throughout their way to the temple and to the sanctorum. The devout, almost till the previous generation, used to remember and recite the name of *Govinda* for every mouthful they eat . The name *Govinda* may thus be seen to pervade the entire cultural milieu of Hinduism.

The name *mAdhavaH* occurs thrice. *mA* is lakshmi. Her beloved is mAdhavaH. In *ChAndogya upanishad*, the technique of *madhu-vidyA* is taught. It is a way of worship by which one considers the Sun-God as the honey tasted by the divines and through that worship one attains the knowledge of *Brahman*. So He is the One who is realised by *madhu-vidyA*, therefore *mAdhavaH*. The third interpretation: *mA* is the flow of mind. The mind needs to be controlled from its getting dissipated by the sense organs bringing in several images and impressions of distractions. The three methods of controlling the mind are silence, meditation and practice of yoga. These make one get rid of the bondage to the sense-objects. The One who thus channelises the mind away from the sense objects (*mAm cittavRttim dhavati dUrI-karoti*) is *mAdhavaH.* Also the family of *madhu* is one branch of the *yadu* dynasty. And the One who belongs to the *madhu* clan is *mAdhavaH.*Again, *mA* is learning. The Lord of that learning is *mAdhavaH*.

SrIdharaH is His name because He holds *SrI*, the divine Mother, the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity, in His divine chest. She is therefore the most proximate to the Lord and that is why we pray to Her to plead for our cause.

hRshIkeSaH is His name because He is the Lord of the senses which bring us all the pleasures of life. *harsha* is happiness or pleasure. *hRshIkA* is that which causes pleasure. The Lord of all the *hRshIkAs* is hRshIkeSaH. . He is the One who remains as the Moon in our mind, as the Sun in our eyes, and other deities in our various senses and make them sense. So He is the lord of these all, therefore *hRshIkesaH*. Also *hRshI* means the light rays from the Sun and the Moon; they are the ones which bring us the pleasures of Mother Nature. They are His *keSas,* that is, they are His rightful property, therefore *hRshIkeSaH*.

*padmanAbha*H appears three times in the *sahsra-nAma*. *padma* means lotus and *nAbhi* means the navel. The three meanings of *padmanAbha* are: He in whose navel stands the lotus from which the creator *BrahmA*, the source of the universe, originated; He whose navel is beautifully shaped like a lotus; He who resides in the central part of the heart lotus - the reference here being to the vedic passage which says: *It (The Supreme) lies below the heart as an inverted lotus, the stalk of the lotus reaching just above the navel: (nArAyaNopanishad)*

padma-koSa-pratIkASam hRdayam cApy-adho-mukham / adho nishTyA vitastyAnte nAbhyAmupari tishTati //

In addition to these three meanings *padmanAbha* has an esoteric meaning derived from the fact that the word *mahA-padma* stands for the number million-million (10 raised to the power 12). The name symbolically states that the Transcendental Supreme is the Ultimate source of Time . Go to *padmanAbha*.

The name *dAmodara* has the unique distinction of building into itself the two parts of the Lord - one, the naivete that was exhibited by Him when He as a child was bound by a few feet of rope tied around his waist by His mother Yasoda; and the other, the divine grandeur which in its cosmic form has the entire universe in its stomach. *dAma* means rope. His stomach (*udara*) was bound by the rope affectionately tied round his waist by the mother. *dAma* also means abode; the abode of the whole universe is His stomach. A third meaning is: he is greatly compassionate (*udAra*) towards even sinful people, because of his self-control (*dama*).

12. From the three hundred names of lalitA

These are names from *lalita-triSati*, three hundred names of *lalitA*, just as *lalitA-sahasra-nAma* is a compendium of 1000 names for the mother goddess. This particular piece, *triSati*, is considered to be even more sacred and powerful than the *sahsra-nAma*. The names are not just names, each one of them is a *mantra* -- in the sense that they have esoteric spiritual meanings and when recited, the very recitation, even without the understanding of the meaning, can give powerful effects, just because of the vibrations they can generate. Every *sahasra-nAma* and every name of God has this characteristic, but in the case of *lalitA-triSati* it is expressly certified to be so. Consequently each name is dense with meanings, not only with the obvious ones but with several non-obvious profound interpretations. Our source for the meanings of the names in the *triSatI* is Adi-Shankara who has written an elaborate commentary on it.

There is a fifteen-letter *mantra* for the Goddess which is not only famous but at the same time forms the greatest of secrets in the worship of the Goddess -- secret in the sense that the *mantra* has to be earned from a *guru* orally after a number of prerequisites are fulfilled to the satisfaction of the *guru*. The three hundred names in the *triSati* occur in groups of twenty names, one for each letter of the fifteen-letter *mantra*. So the first 20 names all start with the letter '*ka*' which is the first letter of the *mantra*. The second 20 names all start with the letter '*e*' which is the second letter of the *mantra*; and so on it goes. The *mantra* is thus well-known because we can guess the text of the *mantra* by

putting together the first letters of the fifteen groups of 20 names. But we are not supposed to be in possession of the *mantra* until we have 'got' it from a *guru* -- who must have himself repeatedly recited it several thousands of times with all the reverence and concentration it demands so that he possesses the spirit of the *mantra* in him!

This concept of the spiritual possession of a *mantra* is an important part of the culture of the religions of the East. And In Hinduism particularly, the necessity to repeat the *mantra* has an extraordinary emphasis because the effect of the *mantra* is held to be proportional to the intensity of the spiritual possession of it and this latter, is directly proportional to the number of times it has been repeated formally and reverentially. We shall give below the meanings for probably a little less than one-tenth of the *triSati* garland of names of the Mother Goddess. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the serial number of the name in the triSati.

(3) *kalyANa-guNa-SAlinI:* the One who is possessed of all auspicious attributes. But the *upanishads* speak of Her as ' -- the Witness, the Pure Sentience, the Attributeless'. The *sahasranAma* itself includes the name *nirguNA*, the attributeless. In spite of all this the attributeless Absolute is here talked of as possessing attributes. They are actually attributes superimposed on the Mother Goddess, who is the *cit-Shakti*, the Consciousness Absolute. The Attributes themselves are only adjuncts and what we are praising is only the Absolute seen through these adjuncts. There is nothing wrong in worshipping the Mother in this attributed form rather than in the attributeless way. Thus worshipped the Mother will grace us to become capable of transcending the abyss of plurality and comprehend Her as the Formless Absolute.

(8) *kalmashaghnI* : the One who destroys defaults, blemishes and sins, thus confirming the Lord's promise: *aham tvA sarva-pApebhyo mokshayishyAmi mA Sucah B.G.* - 18-66. The word also means the One who is the Knowledge Absolute, which according to the *Gita* again, is the Fire of Wisdom that burns to ashes all the luggage of *karma* that one carries along: *jnAnAgnis-sarva-karmANi bhasmasAt-kurute tathA / bhagavad-Gita, 4 - 37* .

(20) *karma-phala-pradA*: the dispenser of the fruits of actions. The actions themselves are insentient and so cannot give their fruits. There must be a sentience behind the dispensing act. It is the Absolute that dispenses. But the Absolute is actionless. It only witnesses. Everything happens in its presence. The original action happens in, and because of, its presence. The dispensing of the fruit also by the *prakRti* (the Power or Energy of the Absolute) happens in, and because of, its presence. The Lord is the *karmAdhyaksha* (the director of Actions); He Himself says: *'labhate ca tatah kAmAn mayaiva vihitAn hi tAn' B.G. 7 - 22.*

(23) *ekA-nekAksharA-kRtih*: She shines in both the forms, that of a single (= *eka*) syllable (= *akshara*) and that of multiple (=*aneka*) syllables. What does this mean? She is both *mAyA* (deception, illusion) and *avidyA* (ignorance). The first one is the adjunct of the Lord and it is in His control. Its symbolism is the single syllable '*Om*' that represents the Absolute Transcendental Truth. *avidyA* (ignorance) on the other hand is the adjunct

of the individual souls and its multiplicity is as infinite as the number of individual souls. *avidyA* is individual ignorance that clings to the soul and prevents it from realising its transcendental nature whereas *mAyA* is Cosmic Ignorance which is in the complete control of the Lord. It is *prakRti* the Goddess that becomes both.

(24) ***etat-tad-ity-anirdeSyA*** *:* We cannot pinpoint Her as this or that. This is the literal meaning of this name. But its meaning goes deeper. The word '*etat*' meaning 'this' signifies the visible universe, which is perceptible to the senses. The word '*tat'* signifies 'that' and points to that Cosmic Absolute Truth which is transcendent and immanent and further is never perceptible to the senses. It is '*aSabdam*', not describable by sound sense, '*asparSam*', not indicatable by the sense of touch, '*avyayam*' immutable, '*nirguNam*' with no attributes, '*nishkalam*' with no marks or specifications. Then how can it be at all described? The scriptures say it is not that which is described by speech but it is that which makes speech possible; it is not what is seen by the eyes, but it is that which makes the eyes see. So how can you decide whether it is this or that ? Is it the cause which is invisible or the effect which is visible? You cannot exclusively point to one of them and say it is only that and not this. It is not just this individual soul, nor is it just that Absolute, without reference to the individual soul. The individual soul has certain qualities like ignorance which do not belong to it absolutely, and the Absolute has certain facets like the capability to create, which is only a temporal phenomenon and not a definitive facet. So in this sense it is not possible to say it is this or that exclusively.

(53) ***ISAdhi-devatA****:* She is the goddess-divine who is 'above' the *ISa* (*ISa* + *adhi*) where *ISa* stands for both the Almighty and the individual *jIva* - in the sense that She is the substratum that remains after one discards the adjuncts of the *ISvara* (almighty) and of the *jIva* (individual soul). The adjunct of *ISvara* is *mAyA* and the adjunct of the individual soul is *avidyA*, that is, ignorance. She is above (= '*adhi'*) both.

(64) ***lAkinI:*** *lam akam asya asti iti lAkinI*. '*kam*' means the Absolute *Brahman*. '*akam*' means what appears as not-*Brahman*, namely, the universe. Where this universe merges into (= obtains '*layam'*, dissolution) is *lam*. By association of ideas, *'layam'* is taken to include also 'creation' and 'sustenance'. So *lAkinI* signifies that which is the fundamental source from which all creation happens, all is sustained and into which all merge, that which shines as the base of all this universe of names and forms.

(72) ***lakshaNAgamyA***: that which is unobtainable (*agamyA*) by definitions, called *lakshaNas*. There are three kinds of *lakshaNas*. *jahal-lakshaNa* is exemplified by 'the tea-shop on the Ganges'. How can a tea-shop be 'on' the Ganges?. Here the word 'Ganges' is not to be taken as the river Ganges. By context, the word 'Ganges' here only indicates 'the bank of the Ganges'. Thus the word 'tea-shop on the Ganges' simply means 'the tea-shop on the banks of the Ganges'. So the river-meaning of the word Ganges is to be discarded. '*jahat*' means 'discarded. So this is an example of a definition which indicates by discarding. The second kind of *lakshaNa* is exemplified by the statement 'white is coming first' in the context of a race of horses, say, where the white horse is coming first. Here the whiteness in the definition is not discarded in the derivation of the meaning. This is called '*ajahal-lakshaNa'*, the definition which does not discard.

But when we try to understand the relationship between the individual soul (= *tvam*, meaning you) and the *Brahman* (= *tat*, meaning that Absolute) we cannot have either of these two kinds of definitions; because, the discarding technique of the definition will discard the 'spiritual essence' present in both and the 'non-discarding' definition will take the ignorance of the soul, which is not in *Brahman* and will also take the creative '*mAyA*' aspect of *Brahman*, which is not in the individual soul. So we have to go to the third kind of *lakshaNa*, called *jahad-ajahal-lakshaNa* -- meaning the definition which discards and also not discards! This means we discard the facets which are not in both and do not discard the factors which are present in both. This is what we do whenever we say 'That person is the same as the one I saw a few years ago in the mental hospital'. We identify the commonalities of the 'two' persons we are talking about and we also discard the obvious incongruences in the two cases we are talking about. So also when we say that 'Thou art That' we discard the Ignorance aspect of 'thou' and the 'creative' aspect of 'That', but we take into consideration the spiritual content of both and assert that the spiritual content is the same. But even this definition does not describe who 'That' or 'Thou' is. The definition helps only so far as the discarding and non-discarding aspect goes and only in identifying 'Thou' with 'That'. Thus none of the three kinds of definitions 'define' what the Absolute Truth is. Therefore She is unobtainable by definitions!

(86) *hrImkAra-lakshaNA*: The One which has *hrIm* as its (indicative, *tatastha*-) *lakshaNa*. There are four letters in the one syllable *hrIm*. The '*ha*' stands for *Shiva* as well as Space. Just as Space is uncontaminated or untouched by anything that happens 'in' space, because of its subtlety, cf. *bhagavad-Gita* 13-32:

yathA sarvgatam saukshmyAd-AkASam nopalipyate /
sarvatrA-vasthito dehe tathAtmA nopalipyate //

so also the Absolute which is embedded everywhere in the body is not touched by anything that happens to the body. So the '*ha*' stands for the Absolute. The next letter is '*ra'*. This by fiat of Sanskrit grammar always indicates the fiery aspect of the divine which causes an effect, that which creates. So the *ha* and *ra* together signify the causatively predicated Consciousness Absolute. The '*I'* stands for the 'sustenance' aspect of *Vishnu*. The anusvara - '*m*' - indicates the merging. Thus *hrIm* stands for the creative, sustaining and dissolving aspects for all of which together the source is the Transcendental Absolute Consciousness. The three aspects however singly or together do not define the Absolute; but they indicate, point the direction to, the Absolute. Such a defining characteristic is called '*taTastha-lakshaNa*'. meaning, a 'tentative definition' or 'just an indicative definition'. It is not the final ever-valid definition. Thus the *hrIm* syllable is the *taTastha-lakshaNa* for the Absolute.

(92) *hrIm-garbhA*: The syllable *hrIm* stands for the three Divine Forms constituting the Trinity: *BrahmA, Vishnu* and *Shiva*. These are the three first *saguNa* (with attributes, as opposed to *nirguNa*, attributeless) expressions of the Absolute. The respective Energies are known as *vAmA, jyeshThA* and *roudrI.* The Absolute (that is, the Mother Goddess) has, as it were, all these six in her womb (=*garbha*). That is why she is *hrIm-garbhA*. Recall the declaration in the *Gita:*

mama yonir-mahad-brahma tasmin garbham dadhAmy-aham /
sambhavah sarva-bhutAnAmtato bhavati bhArata //
My womb is the great *Brahman*; that I impregnate;
then takes place the birth of all beings.

(97) *hrImkAra-vedyA*: She is known by the syllable *hrIm*. By Nature she is attributeless. Being attributeless, She cannot be known because being known would make Her an object different from the subject. But the *hrIm* syllable when learnt from the *guru* in formal manner and by making it one's own by listening, enquiry and meditation, one gets into the bliss of the Infinite which is exactly what She is. Thus what is indirect as the Ultimate Absolute becomes direct, through the *hrIm* syllable. Hence the name *hrImkAra-vedyA*. Recall the Lord's words from the *Gita* (7 - 14):

mAmeva ye prapadyante mAyAm-etAm taranti te /
Those who take refuge in Me, they alone cross over this illusion (of *mAyA)*

(98) *hrImkAra-cintyA*: The syllable *hrIM* is analogous to the syllable *aum*; and thus it is the means of meditation of *Brahman*. In both these syllables, the Absolute (*para*-) form and the Attributed (*apara*-) form of *Brahman* are indicated. This is an esoteric mystery well-known to the practitioners of the philosophy of *yoga*. Thus *hrIm* contains both the 'facets' of *Brahman* and naturally it is fit to meditate on the Absolute Mother Goddess by the *hrIm mantra*.

(99) *hrIm* : The purport of the syllable, like *aum,* is the blissful state of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the substratum of everything cognisable by the senses and obtainable by mundane efforts. All these physical things are superimposed on the attributeless Mother Goddess known as the *parA-Shakti.* Removing the superimposition is itself liberation. By doing this removal, *hrIm* reveals itself as the absolute *Brahman*.

(110) *hamsa-vAhanA* : The *hamsa* bird is the carrier (*vAhana*) of the facet of Mother Goddess known as *brAhmI.* So She is *hamsa-vAhanA*. A more esoteric meaning would be as follows. The word *hamsa*, when derived from the root verb meaning motion (*hanti*) stands for both the Sun and the vital air known as *prANa.* The Consciousness that is our essential core has both the Sun and the *prANa* as indicators (*vAhana*) of its manifested omnipresence. So She is *hamsa-vAhanA*. Recall from *T.U.*: (II - 8 - 14)

sa yaScAyam purushe / yaScAsAvAditye / sa ekaH /
And this one who is in the man, and that one who is in the Sun, He is One.

The supreme Bliss is described as 'He who resides in the Sun'. He is One with the One who resides in the Man, in the sense that the space in a pot, standing separately, is one with space as such.

(124) *sarva-mangalA* : She is auspicious by nature. Even unthinking duds, if they resort to any one of the methods of devotion like meditation, recitation, worship, prostration, or ritual *arcanA,* are blessed by Her with what they want. So She is auspicious even for them. Also She is the spiritual core of every being and in that sense She is auspicious Bliss to all. Also the word '*sarva*' connotes Lord *Shiva* and to Him She is certainly the

most beloved, in fact She is half of Him and so auspicious to Him. Also, *mangala* denotes 'woman' and all women are the manifestations of the Mother Goddess, Recall here the words of Devi *BhA.*:

striyAs-samastAs-sakalA jagatsu
She is auspicious to all because
women are generally auspicious to all.

(125 to 127) sarva-kartRI, sarva-bhartRI, sarva-hantRI : She is the doer through her *mAyA Shakti*. She is the sustainer of everything in the universe. She is the destroyer at the time of deluge. Thus the three names characterise Her as the Power behind the three functions of the Trinity. Recall the lines from taittirIya-upanishad: (3 - 1)

yato vA imAni bhUtAni jAyante,
yena jAtAni jIvanti, yat-prayanty-abhisamviSanti
From which all beings here are born;
having been born, by which they remain alive,
and into which, on departing, they enter.

(133) *sarva-soukhya-dAtRI* *: soukhya* is happiness. There are four kinds of this: *priya*, the feeling of happiness experienced by just seeing the things we want to possess; moda, the feeling experienced when we obtain what we wanted; *pramoda,* the feeling experienced in the actual enjoyment of the thing we wanted; and *Ananda*, the holistic experience of Bliss by the experiencer. All this is given by Her according to the *karma* and *bhakti* of the individual *jIva*. So She is the giver of all kinds of *soukhya* to all.

(134) *sarva-vimohinI :* She creates the delusion for all - in the sense, that She is the *mAyA Shakti* and so all the false knowledge that we get is from Her! Note that this is not said in any derogatory sense. She is the substratum of everything and therefore also of our intellect, and of our ignorance. Recall the words of the *Gita*: (5 - 15)

ajnAnenAvRtam jnAnam tena muhyanti jantavaH /
Knowledge is covered by Ignorance; That deludes all beings

(137) *sarvAva-guNa-varjitA:* *avaguNa* is bad qualities, namely those that lead to dishonour, disgrace, and disrepute. She is devoid of all such qualities. Of course thid does not mean to attribute good qualities to the attributeless parA-*Shakti*. She is beyond all qualities. All qualities are those of the mind which is only a superposition on the substratum of the Absolute. In that sense She is not affected by any of them either good or bad. The Space within a jar is not in any way affected by the qualities of the jar. Its relationship to the jar by means of the shape or quality of the jar is a transitory phenomenon. Listen to Ka.U. (5 - 11):

sUryo yathA sarva-lokasya cakshuH na lipyate cakshushair-bAhya-doshaiH /
ekas-tathA sarva-bhUtAntarAtmA na lipyate loka-dukhena bAhyaH //
Just as the Sun, which is the eye of the whole world,
is not tainted by the ocular and external defects,
similarly the Self, that is but one, the immanent one, in all beings,
is not tainted by the sorrows of the world, It being transcendental.

(142) *kAla-hantRI* *:* (This name occurs also in *lalitA-sahasra-nAma*) She destroys, puts an end to, Time (*kAla*). Time originates from Her. Time finally merges in Her. So She is beyond Time. The concept of Time does not apply to Her. So She 'destroys'Time. The word *kAlah* also means the God *yama* of death. So kAlah is Death. Death is what occurs to those who are in the vortex of *samsAra*, the transmigratory cycle. But those who have crossed the tranmigratory cycle by the Grace of the Mother have no business with Death. Thus She 'conquers' Death. When we are unaware of the Mother, that much of Time is wastefully spent, that is Time is drained. The more our Time is drained the more we are nearer to Death. Thus Time takes us irrevocably to Death. But those moments of our awareness of the immanent presence of the Mother, are conserved moments of Time. Thus saved, the end of our Time is postponed. And those who are aware of Her presence constantly and uninterruptedly, conserve all their Time and Death does not approach them! Thus She destroys the 'power' of Time that brings Death nearer.

There is another aspect of this word '*kAla*'. The human life is determined by the number of breaths he inhales and exhales. One inhaling followed by an exhaling is counted as one breath. In the period of 24 hours between one sunrise to next sunrise, one is supposed to have 21,600 such breaths - which, on calculation, gives onbe breath for every 4 sec onds. The more one can reduce this number of 21,600 the longer one lives. This is one reason for the *prANAyAma* having a beneficial effect on one's longevity. When we hold the breath inside, the mental aberrations also subside. This is called *citta-vRtti-nirodha,* that is, the stoppage of mind flowing into its channels. When the mind is trained to control its usual flow of thoughts, that is the road to total Realisation. And that is the time when Time itself stops!. The Power of Consciousness within us, which is nothing but the Mother Goddess is the Prime Mover of this achievement, if at all, of ours, and in that sense therefore, She is the destroyer of Time!

(153) kAruNya-vigrahA *:* Here a form is attributed to the Goddess. It is the form of total compassion and grace. The devotees always need the Grace of the almighty. But if the Almighty is taken to be attributeless, then it may be illogical to expect any activity from that Absolute, in the form of a blessing or benefaction on us. It is absolutely necessary to visualise an attributed God or Goddess with an active intelligence which reacts to our suffering, responds to our prayers and showers its compassion on us. This is exactly what the Mother Goddess *lalitA* is. She is Compassion and Grace personified! Grace is part and parcel of Her. Grace is Her body. That is why when we pray for the Grace of God, we pray to Her. Prayer to a personal God should be to a form which comes out of its own free will to create, which is unbounded by the *kArmic* cycle, which is a treasure house of sat, cit, and Ananda and whose sole purpose is to pour out grace. All these constitute the foremost qualities of the Mother.

(162) hamsa-gatiH *:* The simplest meaning is "She whose gait (*gatih*) is lovely and majestic like the *hamsa*, which is the carrier-bird of Creator *BrahmA*. But there are several esoteric meanings. The passage of life-giving air in and out of the human body is called 'hamsa'. cf.

hakAreNa bahir-yAti sakAreNa punar-viSet /
It goes out by the (vocalisation of) '*ha*' and comes in by (that of) '*sa*'.

This *hamsa-mantra* therefore is the constant routine of human life, inspite of its involuntariness. It is called *ajapA-mantra* - where *ajapA* stands for that which is not being recited. She, the Mother Goddess, is of this form.

Also *hamsa* denotes the indiviual soul who gets a body appropriate to the merits and demerits acquired by it in its eternal journey. gati is the ultimate destination, of these souls. She is the One who is the ultimate Destination of all souls. cf. *brahmvid-Apnoti param* (*T.U.;* 2 - 1) meaning, the One who knows *Brahman*, reaches the Supreme. 'From where he never returns' says the scripture in another place: '*yad-gatvA na nivartante*'.

Also *hamsa* denotes a renunciate who has had the Enlightenment of the absolute and therefore has no attachment to any particular place or individual. So such renuciates roam from place to place. Such are those who know Her as She is. So She is the One who is known by such *hamsa'*s.

(171) hArda-santamasApahA : There is a darkness (*santamas)* of Ignorance covering up the spiritual center in the heart where the spark of Absolute Consciousness is situated. Mother goddess is the One who dispels (*apahanti*) this darkness. *hArda* is that which pertains to the heart.

(173) ***hamsa-mantrArtha-rUpiNI :*** She personifies in Herself the significance and meaning of the *mantra* '*hamsa*'. The '*ha'* syllable connotes the word '*tat'* (= 'That')of the upanishads. The '*sa*' syllable connotes the word '*tvam*' ('You'). 'That ' is not amenable to direct perception. 'You' is direct experience. The *mantra* '*hamsa*' contains within itself the conglomerate identity of both obtained by what is called the definition which discards and does not discard -- *jahad-ajahal-lakshaNa* .

(183) ***laya-sthid-yudbhaveSvarI :***She is the root cause (both the material and the efficient cause) for dissolution (*laya*), sustenance (*sthiti*) and birth (*udbhava*) . Athing may be produced from its efficient cause but it cannot return to that at dissolution unless it is also the material cause. That is why the *laya,* dissolution is mentioned here first.

(191) ***labhyetarA :*** Here the word 'labhyA' means that which is obtainable by action motivated by theory of *karma* and *bhakti*. She is not obtainable by these She is *'antar-mukha-samArAdhyA'* (to be propitiated by an inward perception). She is *'bahir-mukha-sudurlabhA'* (not obtainable by external means).

(225) ***sad-asad-ASrayA :*** She is the *ASraya* (substratum, base) for both *sat* and *asat.* Here *sat* stands for the three elemental fundamentals Earth, Water and Fire because these are perceptible by the senses of smell, sight and taste. *asat* stands for the remaining two elemental fundamentals, namely, air and space which are not amenable to these but are so only to sound and touch. The universe is both *sat* and *asat*. It has no reality of its own. It appears to be present because of the presence of the substratum namely the Absolute.

(277) *labdha-nAnAgama-sthitiH* : She maintains the different vedas (*Agama* is used here in this sense) which proclaim the three methods of spiritual upliftment, namely, *karma*, upAsanA (*bhakti*) and jnAna. She maintains them not only during the period of manifestation of the absolute but also during those periods of non-manifestation. Further She observes the vedic regulations like the pAtivratya-Dharma in tune with the Lord's declaration (B.G. 3 -23, 24):

yadi hyaham na varteyam jAtu karmaNyatandritaH /
mama vartmAnuvartante manushyAH pArtha sarvaSah//
utsIdeyurime loka na kuryAm karma cedaham //
Should I not ever engage myself in action,
without relaxation, men would in every way follow My Path.
These world would perish if I did not perform action.

(294) *hrImkAra-vedopanishat* *:* She is the upanishad for the veda that is the very syllable *hrIm.* This syllable stands for the Mother Goddess. The Vedas stand for the Transcendental Absolute. This latter is indicated by the upanishads. '*upa*' means proximity. By the 'proximity' of *mAyA* with the Absolute , the latter is taken by us to be the attributed Almighty and that is reflected in our mind as the soul. So the soul indicated by the word '*upa*' rids itself of the adjunct of Ignorance and becomes the Absolute itself. This is the meaning of upanishad. In other words the *jIva,* the individual soul, recognizes Himself to be the Absolute. Thus the term upanishad connotes the Absolute Itself. The syllable *hrIm* is the veda that takes us to the Absolute.

(300) *hrImkAra-para-soukhya-dA* *:* She gives happiness and satisfaction to those who are intent on the meditation or recitation of *hrIm*. This happiness comes out of the benefaction by the Absolute of all the four goals of life, namely, *Dharma, artha, kAma* and *moksha*. Another meaning is: She gives a holistic (*para*) happiness as against the individual happiness associated with the Divinities *BrahmA, Vishnu* and *Shiva.* This is usually referred to as the Consummate Integrated Bliss. Recall from Ch.U.

yatra nAnyat-paSyati nAnyac-chRNoti nAnyad-vijAnAti sa bhUmA /
yatra anyat-paSyati anyac-chRNoti anyad-vijAnAti tad-alpam //
Where one sees not another, where one hears not another,
where one cognizes not another, that is Infinite;
Where one sees another, where one hears another,
where one cognizes another, that is finite

13. Names from the ashTottara of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

(NOTE: Devotees, across the world, of Sathya Sai Baba consider him to be an incarnation of the Transcendental Absolute. Those readers of this who have reservations regarding this belief may ignore all references to him in this Section).

The *ashTottara (* = 108; standing for the string of 108 names used for offering flowers at the Lotus Feet of the Lord*)* of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is well-known among the

large world-wide family of His devotees. It is part of their daily routine. Usually many of the names are understood as referring to His various miracles, or the historical facts and events associated with Him. But what is less familiarly known is the fact that the names which do not particularly refer to a historical event are already the names found in the various *sahasra-nAmas* and *stotras* of Hindu literature and carry a profound meaning which goes back to the very roots of Hindu religion, culture, and philosophy. They legitimately apply also to Baba because He is the Lord Himself. We shall take up some of these names and dwell on their esoteric and philosophical meanings. We shall also append a number to each name; this number being just the serial number in the *ashTottara.* This will enable the reader to locate it in the *ashTottara*

We give each name in the form in which it is familiarly known, namely, as a process of offering flowers at the feet of the Lord, known technically as *arcanA*. In other words this process prefixes an *Aum*, keeps the name in the dative case and suffixes a *namaH*.

The word *namaH* means prostration. But it is not just that simple. There are two syllables there, namely, *na* and *ma*. The syllable *na* stands for a negative. The syllable *ma* stands for the word *mama* which means, 'my' or 'mine'. Together the word *namaH* says 'not mine'. So when we offer anything to the Lord, say, a flower in the form of an *arcanA*, we better recall to our mind that we are offering what is naturally His, to Himself. It is not as if something belongs to us and we are offering it to Him. The only thing that belongs to us is, probably, our mind. It is this that we should offer to Him so that He can use it, come and reside in it, as He thinks fit. Instead of doing that we are offering a flower, or sometimes an eatable, calling it *naivedya*, or sometimes some money, in the hope of getting a greater benefit reward from Him, or sometimes our service, in the hope of a due recognition in due time. None of these belong to us. They are all His. Baba Himself very often tells us that the word *namaH* has to be repeated as many times as we need to wean ourselves from the so-called 'possessions' of ours, saying, not mine, not mine. In fact expositors on this subject have even this much to say. In the sequence of the two syllables *na* and *ma* in the word *namaH*, they say the order is significant. The *na* precedes the *ma*, because, if it was the other way, the moment '*ma'* is pronounced by Man, his ego might pop up and refuse to let him say the negative '*na*' thereafter, since it usually holds on to its possessions really tightly!

There is another esoteric significance of the word *namaH*. The T.U. says:

taM nama ity-upAsIta / namyante'smai kAmAH //
Worship Him with '*namaH*'; then Desires will prostrate at your feet.

This means that the very desires which constitute the uncontrollable factor in our mind, will fall at our feet and therefore be in our control! The simple *mantra* for this is the word '*namaH*' with which we should worship the Lord. This is why the word *namaH* is universally used in all worship in the entire subcontinent of India. The greeting *namaste* (*namaH* + *te*) that is used in ordinary conversation, has also this esoteric purpose. The real prostration is not just to 'you' meaning 'the other person' whom we are greeting, but in addition it really points to the Divinity inherent in the other person. and to this Divinity we say, nothing is mine; it is all Yours, Oh Lord. This inherent build up of such a great

philosophical truth as an ordinary gesture of greeting in our daily lives is a great legacy that our ancestors have left for us. Now let us go to the (selected) names:

2. *Aum SrI sAi satya-svarUpAya namaH*
76. *Aum SrI sAi jnAna-svarUpAya namaH*
36. *Aum SrI sAi AnandAya namaH*

These three names together denote the *sat-cid-Ananda* facet of the Absolute Supreme. In fact they together form a definition of the Absolute. *sat* is Absolute Existence. This is the same as Absolute Truth, i.e., *satya*. *jnAna* is Wisdom, Knowledge, Enlightenment. *Ananda* is Happiness, Bliss. *svarUpa* is Form, personification. He is the Personification of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss. If You want to describe Him as He is, He is Truth, He is Knowledge, He is Bliss. That is His form. That this is so of the Absolute is given in the Upanishad by the defining statement: *satyaM-jnAnaM-anantaM brahma*. Here *anantaM* means Infinite, Infinity. Infinity is nothing but Bliss. In short the three names above are not to be taken as qualities of the Absolute, they are definitions. A complete discussion of the nuances of this definition as well as the thought process that follows the definition and which therefore forms the very basis of Hindu religion and philosophy may be found in the chapter on 'The Absolute As it is'.

Another comment about these three names of the Lord. What is the Form of the Lord? If He is Formless, then how do we define Him? Can He be defined and delimited? The Upanishads have debated this question and have finally come out with the answer that satyaM jnAnaM and anantaM together distinguish the Formless *Brahman* from everything else and so this is the best definition that could be given. Therefore they say, *satyam, jnAnaM* anantaM is the 'Form' of the Formless *Brahman*!. The *svarUpa* (Form As It is) can only be *satyam jnAnaM anantaM* and nothing else. Everything else is only an indicator definition. And now comes the remarkable thing about the Sai *ashTottara.* Among the 108 names, the name ending with *svarUpAya namaH* (i.e., prostrations to one 'of the Form ...) occurs exactly four times:

jnAna-svarUpAya namaH
satya-svarUpAya namaH
(45): mUrti-traya-svarUpAya namaH; and
(16): maheSvara-svarUpAya namaH.

The last two here are necessary to be said of the 'human' form of *sAi bhagavAn*. In spite of the fact that He appears to be in human form, He is nothing but *maheSvara* (Lord *Shiva*), or nothing but the three-in-one form of the Trinity (*BrahmA, Vishnu, Shiva*). If we set aside this, for a minute, we see that very legitimately the word svarUpa has been used with *jnAna* (No.76) and *satya (*No.2); because that is the definition of the Almighty as He is. Since the word *svarUpa* denotes the intrinsic 'form' without which the entity is not what it is, the use of the word '*svarUpa*' with *jnAna* and *satya* and with no other is full of significance in the context of the Absolute As It is. The only other word with which it could have been used is '*Ananda*' and in this case (No.36) the word *Ananda* itself is

used as the name and this is certainly even stronger than the name '*Ananda-svarUpa*'. My *praNAms* to those early devotees who composed this *ashTottara* of BhagavAn in this meaningful way!

27. Aum SrI sAi abhaya-pradAya namaH
35. Aum SrI sAi SaraNAgata-trANAya namaH
38. Aum SrI sAi Arta-trANa-parAyaNAya namaH

The word *abhaya* (*a-bhaya)* means fearlessness. He gives fearlessness to us; it means He removes our fear. *SaraNAgati* is surrender. '*trANa*' is protection, security. Those who surrender are protected or are made secure. *Arta* means afflicted. *parAyaNa* means commitment. He is committed to the protection of the afflicted - is the meaning of the third name above. These three names focus on the quality of the Lord wherein He is THE Refuge for all those who are afflicted. He never lets us down if we call Him. Even when we do not call Him He protects us. But that is another part of the story. Here the emphasis is on His assurance of protection to all those who surrender to Him. Lord Sri Rama makes this famous assurance to all humanity: (V.R. 6-18-33):

sakRd-eva prapannAya tavA-smIti ca yAcate/
abhayaM sarva-bhUtebhyo dadAmy-etad-vrataM mama //
I vouchsafe security against all living beings
to him who comes to me only once
and seeks protection (from me) saying 'I am yours';
this is my vow.

Lord Sri Krishna makes even a more comprehensive assurance in the *Gita* (9 - 22):

ananyAS-cintayanto mAm ye janAH paryupAsate /
teshAM nityAbhi-yuktAnAM yogakshemaM vahAmy-ahaM/
To those men who worship Me, thinking of no other,
to those ever self-controlled, I secure for them
that which is not already possessed by them
and preserve for them what they already possess.

In another context, in the same *Gita* 9- 31:

kaunteya pratijAnIhi na me bhaktaH praNaSyati /
Oh Arjuna, I promise to you; my devotee never perishes.

Here are the similar assurances of the Lord in the Bible: (Mathew 7: 7-8 and John 15: 7)

Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for.
Keep on looking, and you will find.
Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened.
For everyone who asks, receives.Every one who seeks, finds.
And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.
But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you,
you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted!
Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid of them!

The Lord your God will go ahead of you.
He will neither fail you nor forsake you

Sathya Sai Baba Himself assures us: *You take one step towards me; and I will take ten steps towards you.*

The third name above namely *Arta-trANa-parAyaNa* has a great significance. The word is very commonly used with reference to Lord *Vishnu* because there is a hymn in praise of *Vishnu* by name: *Arta-trANa-parAyaNa-stotraM*. This was done by Kuresa, one of the intimate disciples of Sri Ramanujacharya in the 13th century. See the Section 'Six Monumental Witnesses' in the chapter 'An Initial Exposure to the Spiritual Ascent'.

A few words about the concept of surrender will be in order in the context of these three names. Devotees of Sai Baba have heard of the concept of 'surrender' from bhagavAn himself and also from the numerous personal experiences of devotees. Traditionally the concept of surrender has been elaborately described, particularly, in works which belong to the vaishnavite schools. The Act of Surrender (prapatti), according to the Ramanuja school, has six requirements:

1. *The determination to do only that which is favourable to the Lord and pleasing to Him*. (*AnukUlyasya sankalpaH)*. It was here that the famous surrender of Bharata to Rama failed in its norms. Bharata wanted to bring back Rama to the capital, and not allow Him to continue his stay in the forest. This the Lord not only did not like but it went against His more fundamental requirement of upholding the promise to which the father Dasaratha was committed. Vibhishana on the other hand is even certified by the Lord as to have come with friendly intentions only (*mitra-bhavena samprAptaM*) and consequently deserves acceptance.

2. *The avoidance of everything that is unfavourable or displesing to the Lord.* (*pratikUlyasya varjanaM*). It is no use saying I surrender to Baba and then continue to eat non-vegetarian food. Vibhishana was superlative in this requirement; because he was prepared to forego his kith and kin in order to get away from the evil-doing Ravana. As soon as it was clear that Ravana was incorrigible, immediately he arose in the skies to forsake him and go to Rama.

3. *The conviction that 'He will protect me under all circumstances'.* (*rakshishyatIti viSvAsaH*). This conviction has to be a 100 per cent conviction, nothing less. It is a trust with total abandon. This is the abandon which forms the concluding part of His advice in the *Gita.* It is the abandonment of all dependence on anything other than the Lord. We certainly do it sometimes when we are in distress and when we have no hope of any earthly help. But the teachinbg of the Lord is that we should do it at all times!.When Vibhishana abandoned Ravana to go and seek refuge in Sri Rama, he had no prior agreement with or assurance from Rama that the latter will accept him and protect him. Even then he had perfect trust in the goodness of the Lord and was confident that he will be taken in. Rama did not belie his expectations. This trust and confidence in the Lord is the one sure foundation on which the principle of surrender works.

4. *Adoption of the Lord as the only Protector.* (*goptRtva-varaNaM*). In our ordinary lives, when we have tried every means, when we are totally helpless, certainly we take refuge in Him, at least orally, though it is a moot question whether it comes from the heart. When the Doctor finally says: i have done my best, the patient now is in God's hands - at that time we no doubt pray to God and say to Him 'O God, you are my only refuge'. Can we have that attitude even when there is a so-called worldly help or alternative apparently available? That would be the true practice of *SaraNAgati*.

5. *Laying of one's entire self at the disposal of the Lord.* (*Atma-nikshepaM*). This and the previous one (No.4) are both insisted by the *vaishnavite* schools with a particular emphasis unique to them. The devotee realises in due time that whatever he may do his past *karma* and present obstacles to a spiritual pursuit do not giv e him the spiritual advance he yearns for, in spite of the regularity of his life and purity of conduct. He feels that something else other than his conduct, knowledge and faith is necessary. He realises that even if he surrenders to God he is not able to ingratiate himself into the Lord's favour. He needs somebody to intercede on his behalf with the Lord. This is the role of the *guru*. The *Guru* enables him to rid himself of the burden which he is unable to bear any more. This is technically called 'laying off the burden' or 'returning the burden to its rightful owner' and known as *bhAra-nyAsa* in *Sri vaishnava* jargon.

In the case of Satya Sai Baba, both the *Guru* and the Lord are the same. So the devotees of Baba find themselves in a peculiar plight, namely that Baba Himself has to intercede on their behalf to Baba. This is where the devotion of devotees to Baba becomes a rather unusual phenomenon. There are devotees of God all over the world. But devotees of Baba are known for their exuberance of devotion, which is usually transparent. The religious world outside of the Sathya Sai world is always puzzled why there is so much exuberance, a transparent excitement about Baba among His devotees. This is the reason: There is nobody between devotees of Baba and Baba. Not even a *Guru*!

6. *The feeling of total triviality and nothingness vis-a-vis the Lord.* (*kArpaNyaM*). This is the norm by which two famous episodes of surrender in the Ramayana fail to reach up to the ideal surrender. One was Sita's. while she was captive in Lanka she repeatedly surrendered mentally to Lord Sri Rama. But Hers did not satisfy this norm of incapability on the part of one who surrenders. For, if she had chosen to, she could have consumed Ravana himself in the flames of Her absolute chastity, though she did not choose to do it for other reasons. In the same way, there is the episode of Rama's surrender to the God of the Seas. Again this does not meet with this sixth requirement of ideal surrender, because his surrender was not because of inability to achieve what he wanted to achieve. If He had chosen to, He could have dried up the Ocean and have his armies cross it.

46. Aum SrI sAi mukti-pradAya namaH
52. Aum SrI sAi sarva-pApa-kshaya-karAya namaH
93. Aum SrI sAi karma-dhvamsine namaH

These three names focus on (two of the five) Divine functions which emanate from the lotus feet of the Lord. Let us imagine the Lord as *naTa-rAja*, the Cosmic dancer. His

raised foot, namely, the left foot, is the one which does the function of Grace. that is what gives us *moksha* (also known as mukti), release from the transmigratory cycle of births and deaths. Therefore He is called *mukti-prada*, the One who grants *moksha*.

The other foot, the held foot of Lord *naTa-rAja*, (the right foot) has the divine function of *tirodhAna*, namely, obliteration, vanishing, disappearance. This is the magic foot of the Lord. It obliterates all our sins. Remember, when *Shiva* operates the dissolution of the universe and merges everything in Himself at the time of deluge, everything merges into Him certainly; but that is not the end of our *karma*. Our *karma*, as well as our souls lie latent in Him, ready to spurt out at the time of next creation - in due cosmic time. So even though everything dissolves, our *karma* does not. We will born again on the next day of *karma*, to continue our journey to Perfection, in our own slow pace. And in the process of being reborn, we accumulate more *karma*, good and bad and we get more and more involved in the cycle of samsAra. If this has to be cut, our *karma* balance has to be struck off. This is the bonus function of the held foot of the Lord, namely His right foot. That is why He is called *karma-dhvamsI* , the one who destroys, obliterates, our *karma*. We should not omit to propitiate His right foot, therefore, when we do *pAda-namaskAr,* if we want our *karma* to be nullified. By the same reason, He is the destroyer of all our sins: *sarva*, all; *pApa*, sin; *kshaya*, expiry; *kshaya-kara*, destroyer.

72. Aum SrI sAi bhakta-parAdhInAya namaH

This is a very interesting name. *bhakta-parAdhIna* means one who is subservient to His devotees. The name originates from Srimad *BhA.* where in the 9th book, 4th chapter, there is the story of King Ambarisha. The devotion of Ambarisha is so much liked by the Lord that He gives him his own *sudarSana cakra* (= the Lord's disc, called *sudarSana*) which saves him at a crucial time. And that happens when Ambarisha calls the tune. (See the section 'Devotee calls the Tune' in the Chapter'Gems from Shrimad Bhagavatam').When the sage DurvAsa who is at the receiving end of the Lord's disc now, goes to Lord *Vishnu* Himself for protection, the Lord says: I am not free. I am at the control of my close devotees. I am *bhakta-parAdhIna*, says the Lord. There are scores of stories in the *purANas* how the Lord is 'at the mercy' of His devotees. So the name *bhakta-parAdhIna* is very commonly used with reference to God in many contexts. But as a name occurring in one of the *sahasra-nAmas* or *ashTottaras*, it is a rare occurrence. The *Vishnu* sahasra-nAma does not have this name. It only has *bhakta-vatsala* - which simply means only that He loves His devotees. The name is neither in Rama-*ashTottara*, nor in Krishna-*ashTottara*. LalitA-*sahasra-nAma* has the name *bhakti-vaSyA*, which means that the Mother Goddess allows Herself to be controlled by the devotion of Her devotees. This therefore is the nearest in meaning to *bhakta-parAdhIna*, occuring in *sAi ashTottara*.

In the case of *bhagavAn sAi*, there is a countless number of episodes where the lord simply bowed to the devotion of the devotee and allowed Himself to be led by His devotee. In fact many a time His body has suffered illness or disease for the sake of his devotee, thereby warding off the suffering and possible fatal consequence for His devotee. No wonder He is called *bhakta-parAdhIna*.

CHAPTER 2: AN INITIAL EXPOSURE TO THE SPIRITUAL ASCENT

1. The Animal Passions of Man

'Hunger, sleep, insecurity and sex urge are common to men and animals but the understanding of *Dharma* is the extra quality of man which makes what a man is'.

AhAra-nidrA-bhaya-maithunaMca sAmAnyaMetad-paSubhir-narANAM /
dharmo hi teshAM adhiko viSeshaH dharmeNa hInAH paSubhis-samAnAH //
(Hitopadesha)

Without *Dharma* he is just an animal. The word *Dharma* may be loosely translated as: duty or pursuit of social and personal ideals of behaviour. It is one of the untranslatable words in Hindu scriptural literature. It has many more connotations. If the only enjoyment a man knows is that of physical sensations, then he is only a dressed-up walking animal, though a thinking animal. One of the 1330 couplets of the world-famous Tamil classic, *tirukkuraL*, an invaluable guide to the art and science of good living, written in the first century C.E., has this beautiful thought on the same topic: 'Food, clothing and the like are not anything special for beings, but the sense of shame (in doing wrong) is what is special to mankind'.

OonuDai echam uyirkellAm vEralla; nANudamai mAndar chirappu . (Tamil)

Animals probably will never understand man's precocity for clothing, because they have no sense of shame. What distinguishes man from animals is not only the physical sense of shame but a spiritual sense of shame. The Sanskrit language has an interesting word for this: *hrIh*. This is the word which *Adi SankarAcArya* (to be referred to as Shankara very often) interprets in his commentary on *Sanat-sujAtIyaM*, as *akArya-karaNe lajjA*, meaning shame in doing what ought not to be done.

The concept of spiritual sense of shame has, inbuilt into it, the concept of spirituality. One might hasten to think that we are bringing in the idea of spirituality rather extraneously. So first let us clear what we mean by spirituality. What is spirituality? Man has two kinds of mental attitudes, yet he is essentially divine, say the Hindu scriptures. But it is his animal instinct that is more prominent most of the time.

'Beast am I not; yet the ways of the beast I can never forsake'
vilangalEn, vilangalA-dozhindEn-allEn – Appar TevAraM (Tamil)

His divine instinct shows up very rarely, if at all. The animal instincts are those that have been cultivated over several lives. To fight against these and resume permanently one's natural divine instinct, is the purpose of life. The pursuit of the divine instinct in oneself, by oneself, for the benefit of one's own self, is spirituality. This spirituality is to be won step by step by personal effort. It penetrates into one's heart, changes attitudes and purifies all relationships. But why spirituality? In this mundane world of rat-race for prosperity and one-up-manship there are many who think that talking about the need for

spirituality is nonsense. Spirituality, according to them, does not give man bread and butter nor does it provide him the other comforts of life without which he cannot live. This kind of thinking refuses to comprehend why spirituality is needed – just as, animals do not understand man’s need for clothing. Need for clothing will be understood only if the concept of shame is understood. Need for spirituality will be felt only if the concept of inner life or consciousness is understood. If we do not understand this, we are like animals.

The animal in us brings with it six evils which are rooted in the human mind. They are usually recognised as the animal passions in man and constitute the major obstacles in the ascent to spirituality. These are: Lust or any desire that is illegitimate; Attachment and head-long passion for one’s possessions, belongings, kith and kin and opinions; Hate; Anger; Greed; and Confusion and Delusion. These are known, in Sanskrit, as: *kAma, rAga, dvesha, krodha, lobha* and *moha,* respectively. The human mind has perfected these individual evils over several millenia rather persistently and successfully.

In addition to these six, the human mind nurtures six more evil tendencies – for which man cannot blame his animal ancestry. These are: Arrogance; Jealousy, the feeling of discomfort at another’s rise or success; The awkward feeling, ‘why my miseries are not happening to others?’; Spite or Malice – the feeling that does not brook or give any credit to others even when they have legitimately deserved it and so takes pleasure in talking them down; Fad for show – a projection of one’s own name or personality in everything that happens; and Pride, the feeling that nobody else is equal to oneself. These six are known, in Sanskrit, by the words, *mada, mAtsarya, IrSyA, asUyA, dambha* and *garva*, respectively.

These twelve evils or diseases of the mind as we may call them, are all captained, monitored, motivated and prompted by a grand master – the EGO. It is referred to as ‘*aham-kAra*’ in Sanskrit. Nobody escapes it. It is the king-pin of all villainy. It is the source of all evil tendencies in man’s mind. But it is not as if it is unconquerable. By constant practice and dispassion, say the scriptures, one can control these twelve evil tendencies along with their captain, the Ego. By thought the ego was made and so by thought the power of the ego can be unmade. But the thought must now be directed toward a higher entity, for the ego would never allow itself to be attacked. In order that one may succeed in this endeavour, one has to channel the mind toward the only two good tendencies in Man which can oppose each one of the thirteen, with some success. These two are:

- **Faith *(SraddhA)*; and**
- **Devotion-cum-dedication (*Bhakti*)**.

Faith is faith in the divinity of the Self within each one of us. Devotion to that Inner Self and dedication to everything that represents that dvinity together constitute the *bhakti* that is natural to us. But the thirteen evil tendencies in the mind create obstacles for the expression of this devotion and dedication. Not only do they create obstacles but they pull us in exactly the opposite direction, away from the divinity that is inherent in us. It is

therefore necessary to exercise our willpower (*icchA*) and extricate the intellect from the clutches of the Ego and its entire gang of twelve. The will-power has to be trained to recognise the ego everytime it rears its head and to say, 'Hey e-go, you go!' In actuality it is the presence and domination, in each one of us, of this gang of twelve led by their captain, the Ego, that is responsible for the several evils, social and cultural diseases of the society .

These evils are all rooted in one or more of the individual bad tendencies of the mind that we listed earlier. In fact each of the evils of the society can be carefully analysed and traced to individual weaknesses in the members of the society which express themselves collectively because many in the society possess the same weakness in some measure or other. No scientific achievement or progress can root out these evils, without a parallel effort on the humane side by each individual.

Question: How did mind, which is material, attach itself to something that is divine, namely the soul? And when did it do so?

The question implies that the mind was unattached to the soul originally and then at some point of time became attached to the soul. If we rightly understand the concept of mind in Hindu metaphysics, we would discover that there is nothing like mind on its own. It is only a flow of thoughts on the subtle bed of *VasanAs*. It is only a bundle of desires. If there were no thoughts or desires there is no mind. The mind is like a pile of bricks; the moment the bricks vanish, there is no pile. The very existence of mind as an entity implies that there is a past, from which the *VasanAs* have been inherited, and these are the ones which stick to the soul in the form of the mind. Hindu metaphysics proceeds on the assumption that there is an eternal past the beginning of which is non-existent. Even in the so-called *praLaya* time, when everything in the universe merges into Brahma the Creator, the *VasanAs* exist in a latent form attached to individual souls. It is these that blossom in the next (cosmic) day of Brahma. Thus the question whether mind did attach itself to the individual soul at a specific point of time does not arise.

The first challenge for each man is therefore to channelise his mind through his will-power, away from the thirteen evil tendencies into *SraddhA* and *Bhakti*. This task is the task of every member of society. If each individual succeeds in the task of minimising, if not eradicating, the thirteen evils inherent in him, the society is automatically on the road to improvement. Not only does this help us to root out the evil tendencies in us but it does much more. Dedication and Devotion will give us the courage not to bend down or kneel before the Gods of corruption, hypocrisy, exploitation, superstition and all the other associated evils. And this will boost up the morale of the society on its road to progress.

If the individual does not embark upon this task it only means that he has not risen from his animal status. Animals believe in only what is available to their senses. In other words they believe only in the *pratyaksha* – what is sensed. *paSyanti iti paSavaH* – that is the derivation for the word *paSu*, meaning 'animal'. They just 'see', maning, what they sense by their senses is what they know. Only Man can go beyond the senses and think of the unseen, unheard, unsensed. God warns Man by turning his hairs grey and telling him it is

time he turns to Him. Note that animals do not develop grey hairs. They behave like what they should, all the time. Only man does not behave like man; he needs the warning and he gets it. That is the latest time, in his life, by which he should turn his devotion and dedication towards nobler goals and purposes.. Man certainly takes care of himself, makes his life comfortable, provides amusement for his emotional needs, creates arts and literature for his intellectual needs -- these make him different from an animal alright, but he also has an utter disregard for his individual spirituality. When he departs from his own *Dharma* he creates imbalance and perturbation in his own self as well as in his environment. Thereby his progress up the spiritual ladder is impaired; deadly sins are allowed to grow in his heart. He goes down in the scale of *samsAra*, the eternal cycle of births and deaths, in spite of all his secular achievments. What is condemned here is sin and not the sinner. In this sense Hinduism differs from other religions which give man only one birth to do it well or not. Man is not punished *for* his sins; he is punished *by* his sins. Sin is a self-condemning act arising out of a misunderstanding in the sinner as to his own true nature. The going-down in the scale of *samsAra* may mean that one is born in spiritually poorer and more difficult circumstances or one is born even as an animal. But this rebirth takes account of only a small part of our accumulated *karma*, the conglomerate of our actions and thoughts. There is a large part of our accumulated *karma* which is the one which contributes to our tendencies and nature in our future births. This can be reshaped by our present actions and thoughts and so it is up to us to act and feel in such a way that our *karma* opens up a better future for us, if not in this life, certainly in our future lives.

The better future does not simply refer to the spiritual future; it also refers to the material future. Hindu thought and tradition do not undervalue the need for material happiness. It is a mistaken belief to think that Hindu religion emphasizes only asceticism. It wants us to go up the spiritual ladder at our own pace, taste and capacity. It all depends on what we want and how we want it. Do we want earthly pleasures – material goods, sex, wealth, fame, power? Well, we can pursue them all. These goals are termed *artha* (material happiness, wealth) and *kAma* (sensual pleasures). In fact there are four different types of goals which are all legitimate. Technically these are called, *purushArtha*s (= man's goals). Besides the two just mentioned, they are: *Dharma* and *Moksha*. We gave a meaning to *Dharma* earlier but we shall revert to the various connotations of *Dharma* more than once in this book in a spiral fashion, every time shedding a little more light on the concept. The word *Moksha* means salvation or more precisely, liberation.

According to Hinduism, there is nothing wrong in pursuing one or more of these objectives. But Hinduism also asserts with the full force of all its legends, mythology and experience, that in the long run, in due course of everlasting time, that is, if not in this life, in succeeding lives, -- really ultimately, one will tire of pursuing the first three goals (*artha*, *kAma* and *Dharma*) because frustration is inherent in their pursuit. Experience from time immemorial has left traditions of stories and records which go to show that sooner or later every human being reaches a saturation point in terms of worldly pleasures and wealth, beyond which they breed a frustration syndrome. Everyone wants an ultimate peace-cum-happiness. Pursuit of wealth and happiness are certainly part of our daily lives. The pursuit of *Dharma* relates to moral and social behaviour. This is also,

in some sense, in the same ball-park as the other two. Hinduism says that there is a fourth worthwhile goal which is the only goal as far as real ultimate peace-cum-happiness is concerned. And since it believes so, it makes rules even for the pursuit of the other three so that ultimately there is no discordance . In fact in mentioning the four goals of life, Hinduism has a certain sequential order; first it is *Dharma*, next *artha*, then *kAma* and then *Moksha* . In other words, *Dharma* is primary; and so the pursuit of *artha* and *kAma* has to follow the norms of *Dharma*! So the pursuit of even the earthly objectives are to be monitored by rules which are enunciated from the point of view of preparing one to go to the fourth objective, *Moksha*. The idea is, that, when the time comes to seek this fourth goal, beyond the three objectives, either in this life or in later lives, the habits and tendencies accumulated by the ceaseless pursuit of the first three should not come in the way of the fourth. The accumulated habits and tendencies are called *VAsanAs.* The word *vAsanA*, means literally, smell. Technically this is the tendency that we bring along with us from our actions and thoughts of the past like the breeze of air that carries the smell of the rose garden that it has passed through. The animal passions of man have their roots in these *vAsanAs*.

The belief that material happiness is transient does not require a Hindu to neglect the earning of a livelihood or the working of his way up the ladder of worldly success. Far from it. Hinduism has the realism to declare that without a healthy body no spiritual pursuit is possible. Nor can a spiritual seeker sustain himself physically without depending on the environment of a prosperous society. When the Hindu scriptures say that worldly happiness is not the ultimate in happiness they are only reminding us that as we alternate between pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, joy and sorrow, we are only passing from one experience to another – none of which is everlasting. Hinduism pleads with us to stand back and observe ourselves as well as the rest of the world carefully as a scientist. What really is pleasure? It is after all, an intermediate experience between two moments of pain and vice versa. This is not a cynical observation but a ruthless analysis of facts. The two extreme physical experiences of men are birth and death. The first experience leaves no memory and the second experience leaves no experiencer to recall it. In the interval between the two man undergoes an infinite variety of experiences, on the physical, mental and subconscious levels but none of the experiences can be claimed to be permanent. The Upanishads claim on the other hand that Real Permanent Bliss comes from within one's self and that such a bliss which comes from the awareness of one's self is eternal and universal. It requires either a deep intellectual analysis of the self or an actual intuitive experience to corroborate this. It is in the context of such an analysis that one often finds in the scriptures the maxim that material happiness and misery are impermanent and both 'come and go'. All mundane experience of the senses, mind or intellect, whether pleasant or painful are summed up as 'that which comes and goes' (*AgamApAyI*, in Sanskrit) that is, are transient. So one just bears with this syndrome. The fundamental theme of the Hindu teaching, in fact, goes deeper than this. It says: 'What has a beginning must have an end'. To be born means moving towards death. The three goals of man, *Dharma*, *artha* and *kAma*, all operate only within this cycle of births and deaths. The only thing that transcends this cycle is the status of *Moksha*.

2. A Six-party Discussion on the Concept of God

The following is an imaginary six-party conversation on the concept of 'God' in Hinduism. The six persons who are parties to this conversation, namely, RNB, DD, OT, PP, SV and PA are all Hindus who have grown in an atmosphere full of the culture and tradition. They are such thick friends of one another that each knows the others inside out! But the six have different views on Hindu beliefs, philosophy and practices and that makes the conversation interesting.

1. RNB is a rationalist and a non-believer to the extent that he has serious questions on the existence of God. The one thing he appreciates is the necessity for the purification of one's mind. He has a soft corner for *karma-yoga*, because the concept of unselfish service means something to him but his ideas are only vague. His attitudes to his friends' perception of the 'faith' part of religion are rather blurred.

2. DD is a simple and pious devotee, but he is a kind of a 'doubting' devotee, because every alternate day he discovers that his prayers are not answered by God. He jumps from one form of God to another (and Hinduism gives him this flexibility) and is carried by naivity to believe in any one who poses the frontal of a saffron colour. He thinks he understands Lord Krishna and His leelas, but of Krishna's Gita and the philosophical undercurrent running through it, he has only a confused perception, if at all. An undercurrent of vacillation and doubt constantly bothers him. In fact he is the sample for a large number of ordinary Hindus.

3. OT is the orthodox theologist. He knows all the puranic stories. He corresponds to the traditional layman-Hindu, very often superstitious. He does not have a clear understanding of the basic philosophy of the religion and he tends to develop dogmatic attitudes towards viewpoints that do not coincide with his own perception of religion. He thinks he understands both Krishna's pranks as well as his Gita, but his attitudes which have a colour of dogmatism in them prevent him from a full understanding.

4. PP is one who professes Philosophy. Mostly his is an arm-chair philosophy. He believes in the omnipresence of Divinity. He knows that God is immanent in himself and he has to only realise that Godly presence. He believes or cares for nothing else. For him, neither karma yoga nor bhakti nor surrender theory nor the concept of Avatar has any meaning, much less, any fascination. But he is very knowledgeable because he is well-read.

5. SV, the Scientist-Vedantin, on the other hand, has a great fascination for the intellectual exercises embodied in the philosophical schools of Hinduism, the consequent corollary of a karma yoga and so on. He even probes into treatises which deal with these teachings in their depth. He needs 'proof' for everything on the lines of what his scientific mind seems to be familiar with. The concept of One God with myriads of names and forms is unpalatable to him even as an academic hypothesis. He thinks he understands the Gita, but certainly he cannot swallow the pranks of Krishna.

6. AV is an advaita-vedantin. He claims to have read (and understood!) all the advaitic treatises and has probably a good perception of the *PrasthAna-traya*.

The conversation starts in an elementary casual way between #s 1 and 2 on the existence of God. At some point #3 joins in the debate. The conversation turns into a serious debate. #4 also joins now. #s 5 and #6 join in the final stages.

RNB: Good morning DD, what temple did you visit today? What was your latest prayer?

DD: Well, over the weekend I had been to the temple of Guruvayoor. Do you know it draws the second largest crowd of devotees among all Hindu temples, next only to Tirupati? *Guru-vayoor-appan* is the greatest boon-giver according to *Na.*. Among the many prayers I carried to the Lord was one which concerns you. I prayed that God should grant you what you do not have.

RNB: I know what you mean. You have prayed to your God that he should grant me faith in him. And you think he can do that for you.

DD: Why not? God can get anything done if He wills it.

RNB: So do you think He can put that faith in me in spite of my will otherwise?

DD: Certainly. Further I am not asking Him to give me material benefits. I have asked Him, on your behalf, the one and only thing you need and that is not a material benefit.

RNB: That is your feeling about me. But I don't feel I am lacking anything. Why should I have faith in a non-existent God?

DD: Come on, don't repeat all that talk of yours. You seem to take pleasure in denying God. Don't you know that even in the west they are talking about a super-designer who must have designed this universe with all its fantastic order and in-built regularity, which is unexplainable otherwise?

RNB: But you are begging the question. Who designed that super-designer?

DD: That super-designer is God. Nobody designed Him.

RNB: That is exactly my point. You are only making a hypothesis, aren't you?

DD: So what? That is the declaration of all religions of the world.

RNB: Religion is man-made. God is just a creation of man's intelligence. Man created God in his own image as an anthropomorphic super-image of himself. I don't need such a creation.

DD: Have you ever felt depressed when things don't work the way you wanted them to work for you?

RNB: I don't feel depression at such times. I know I am lucky most of the time and some times I am not lucky; that is all.

DD: What is luck, if not God's Grace?

RNB: Why do you bring in God into everything? Luck is luck; there is no God there. What does your God gain by giving me luck? I do my duty and I expect rewards. If I don't get those rewards it only means there is some fault in the system and I have to work towards removal of that fault. You believers rely on God to give you those rewards or correct those faults in the system. Last year you were visiting local temples one by one for redress of your grievances and this year you have gone all the way to *Guruvayoor*. But your grievances are still there!

DD: You may not agreee with this. But it is God that gives all the rewards.

RNB: But if it is a God that rewards only those who pamper him, then I am not willing to have anything to do with him.

OT (entering): Hello friends, it appears you are seriously discussing something. Can I join you?

RNB. Actually we were looking for you. DD has just returned from a trip to *Guruvayoor*. He is trying to convince me that *Guruvayoorappan* is the supreme God. Last year he tried to convince me that the elephant-God Ganesha in the corner of this street is the supreme God. This year it is different!

OT. Nobody can convince you, because you don't believe in anything.

RNB. Why can't you folks give me a logical argument for the existence of God? Don't bring in a bundle of primitive concepts from your Puranas and all your superstitious beliefs.

OT: Is it superstition to believe what hundreds of great men like Shankara, Tirunavukkarasar, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vedanta Desika, Appayya Dikshidar, Kabirdas, Meerabai, Chaitanya or a Vallalar have believed? Is it superstition to believe a Ramakrishna of our own times who saw the Goddess in person? Is it superstition to have trust in a Raghavendra who lives still in his *samadhi* and grants our wishes? Have you ever exposed yourself to the sayings or the life story of any of these? That is exactly your problem, the problem of Ignorance!

RNB: Wait for a minute! I thought you were going to give a logical argument.

DD: The logical argument is three-fold: 1. First you have to let go your mental block which says that that everything can be reduced to simple explanations. You have to change your mental framework to admit truths beyond the reach of your common sense. 2. Just as we individuals have minds of our own there are greater minds which are able to see the global picture more clearly than most of us single individuals. Carrying this analogy further we have to grant a super-mind that may be called the transcendental mind. This is the mind of the all-knowing God. 3. The mystics of the world have a common story to tell the rest of the world. It is a compelling story whose authenticity is difficult to dismiss on the basis of our subjective understanding with our limited minds. ...

RNB: Excuse me. Pardon me for telling you that you are only making profound statements without an iota of logic or personal experience.

PP (entering at this time): What personal experience are you talking about?

OT: RNB wants to have a logical argument for the existence of God And DD is telling him that mystics of the world have a lot of personal experience which we cannot but believe.

PP: I agree with RNB that we should not believe in something of which we have no personal experience.

OT: Come on, that is false logic. Do you have personal experience that so and so is your father?

RNB: Please, my friends, stop going in that direction. Our business here is not to win a point, but to search and find out whether there is any logical way in which we can believe in the existence of God.

PP: That is right. As a professor of philosophy I like Hinduism not because of its variety, flexibility and tolerance but because of its ideal mixture of reason and faith. Reason saves the aspiring devotee from avoidable errors and pitfalls and faith supports him with courage in the hour of despondency.

RNB: Then what is the final authority? Reason or Faith?

OT: Faith in the scriptures, certainly.

DD: But even the *Gita* is difficult to comprehend.

PP: By depending solely on faith in the scriptures one tends to be dogmatic. By depending solely on Reason one may fall into the trap of rationalising one's desire. Such a person proves what he wants to prove. Personal experience by itself can be deceptive because one may be just projecting one's own favourite ideas. All three have to be combined to arrive at the truth. I am told this is what the Upanishads claim to be doing.

RNB: Aren't the Upanishads also full of dogmatic pronouncements called 'maha-vakyas'?

OT: These *mahAvAkyas* are the axioms from which the other things are logically deduced.

PP: Do they tell you why man has been created? What must have been the purpose of creation?

DD: Man has been created in order for him to work out the path to go back to his source, namely God.

RNB: Then it means he was separated from God originally. Why was he separated?

PP: You will go nowhere by asking these questions. Because if you assign some purpose to God for his creation you will have then to question the very omniscience and omnipotence which are part of the definition of God.

RNB: What is wrong in questioning the omniscience and omnipotence? That is why I say you cannot even postulate a God. Because by the nature of your postulation you have also to postulate that he is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. In other words you are postulating everything about him and then you say you can logically deduce his presence from the mahavakyas.

OT: But the omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience have been demonstrated in several instances recorded in the puranas of religion. Have you heard of Prahlada's story where the Lord appeared from a pillar just like that in order to demonstrate the truth of his omnipresence asserted by his devotee?

RNB: These are only stories and have only a story-value.

PP: All of this tantamounts to saying that one should have faith. As I said already, only by a proper mixture of reason and faith you can arrive at the truth. Neither of them singly will be satisfactory.

RNB: On the other hand the laws of nature as discovered by science can explain almost all the phenomena in the universe. And very soon they will also discover explanations for those phenomena which are at present eluding our scientific understanding.

OT: Can science explain all the mystery that is experienced at the individual human level?

DD: All through history we have heard of thousands of individuals who have been emotionally influenced by the Divnity of temple deities.

OT: That is where religion and philosophy play a part. Every temple in the world of Hindus is a monumental example of what spiritual giants have achieved in the past. Their achievements in the spiritual field are all part of the history of that temple.

PP: Hindu philosophy, on the other hand, starts by investigating the mystery surrounding the individual mind. The innermost essence of man refers to the substratum of the individual mind. But ancient Hindu philosophers have seen a parallelism between the study of the individual and that of the universe as a whole.

SV (entering at this point): Friends, I was passing by and I heard the words 'religion', 'philosophy' and 'science' tossed about among you. I think I can join the discussion , if you don't mind.

RNB: What is your opinion, SV, since you have dabbled in both science and Vedanta, about the question of the existence of God? Can you tell us some real good reason why I should believe in God?

SV: Frankly, if you ask my sincere opinion, the existence of God cannot be proved. I would love myself to have a proof but all the proofs they are all giving has some flaw or other. God must be the name we have given to what we cannot understand even collectively. Such a God has to be the creative force, the overall intelligence which governs the universe, the all-pervading essence which binds together everything in the universe and gives life to all living beings.

RNB: Beautiful definition! But only a definition. It does not say whether such a thing exists or not.

PP: If you are looking for it intellectually, it is the creative force, the sustaining power, the motivation towards change, the overall intelligence, the truth.

OT: If you are looking at it emotionally, it is love, goodness, kindness and beauty. Among feminine qualities, says the Lord in the tenth chapter of the *Gita*, "I am glory, beauty, speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and forgiveness". (*KiirtiH shrIr-vAk-ca nArINAM ...*)

SV: If you are looking at it spiritually, it is the ever-present all-pervading essence or spirit that gives life to everything and binds them all.

DD: You are all confusing me. I simply know Him as He who gives me rewards when I do good and punishes me when I default in my ethics or morals.

PP: There are different levels of the conception of God. An answer given to a questioner at one level will not suit or be satisfactory to, the questioner at a different level. When a Hindu child asks you to tell her about God, you can tell her stories about Rama and Krishna. When a teen-ager questions you about the existence of God, you may deal out the super-designer argument, which may satisfy the questioner for the moment. When an adult asks the same question you have to answer at a higher level; the super-designer argument may not work with all persons.

SV: The beauty of Hindu philosophy and religion lies in the fact that instead of starting with the reality of the universal mind (this is the name that I give to God in my understanding of things), they start from what is experienced at the human level. So the innermost recesses of the human mind are first explored. This investigation leads to what constitutes the innermost essence of man. One finds that the innermost essence of man is the seeker himself, rid of all his tools of search. In fact the mind itself is part of the

luggage that is to be shed off. But the exploration of this innermost core is inextricably interlinked with the preconditioning of the mind. This preconditioning is nothing but the cumulative effect of all traces of sensory experience left in the memory bank. This preconditioning differs from individual to individual and so the understanding of the innermost core also varies from person to person.

DD: Ah, I see the point now. It is clear now why I jumped from one God to another in my search for that God who will listen to me! It all depends on the preconditioning of my mind at that time. Wonderful!

PP: The technical jargon that is equivalent to this 'preconditioning' is '*VAsanA*'. This innermost core is what I call the psychic principle. The Vedantins call it the *Atman*.

SV: Though there is no scientific proof of this, it is declared by Vedantic works that this psychic principle, the *Atman*, is so deep-seated within us that it has a sense of undeniable reality that goes with it, in the same sense that one does not look for a proof of one's own existence.

OT: That is because, it is God seated in our heart of hearts. "*ISvara*H sarva-bhutAnAM .." in the last chapter of the *Gita*. He is the One who prompts all our actions and our thoughts.

SV: Don't confuse the issue now by bringing theology and all that stuff about God being the motivator of our actions. RNB here and I would immediately ask you to give logical proof for it and you will be stuck. The subject here is different; it is about the question as to what the innermost core of Man is. Let me continue my observations. This innermost reality within us is the real subject of all our experiences. It is the eternal witness to everything that I do or think.

RNB: But where is God now, in all this?

AV (entering and joining the discussion): It appears you are looking for God.

SV: Now that you have joined us, AV, we would like you to give us the benefit of all your knowledge about Vedanta and advaita to solve this riddle of the existence of God.

AV: Since you have referred to advaita, let me say this much. There is no God other than yourself.

OT: I see you are referring to the *Atman* within each man. But then, that would mean there are several Gods.

PP: Simple. There are not several *Atman*s. The *Atman* within yourself and the *Atman* within myself is the same.

DD: But the question is about God who is Master of the universe and who is the Creator of this universe.

PP: This is where Hindu philosophy has scored. Particularly the advaita school. They assert that the *Atman* which is the innermost core of ourselves is also the transcendent eternal Reality which is omnipresent . The name given to that Supreme Reality is *Brahman*. The declaration of the Upanishads is, according to advaita, *Atman* is the same as *Brahman*, period! This statement is not amenable to any proof. Yogis however say that it will be seen as true in meditative Samadhi.

AV: But instead of getting into those technicalities, let me ask you all: How often have you asked God to provide guidance in making your decisions? And what has been your experience?

DD and OT (together): Almost all the time.

RNB: Frankly, I don't remember to have ever asked God to guide my decisions. And the reason is obvious. It never struck me. I have no practice of going to God for every one of my dilemmas. You may call it my ego, if you want to.

PP: Both of you, RNB on one side and DD and OT on the other, have a point of view which is acceptable. It is no use asking a non-beleiver of God whether he invokes God in his decisions. The question should actually be posed in another manner. "Have you ever had occasion to feel helpless in making decisions? And in such times what do you do?"

RNB: The answer is the same. Even when I felt helpless, how would I go to a non-existent God?

SV: I think we are pursuing matters to a dead end.

AV: May I be permitted to shock you all at this moment? The matter whether God exists or not is not relevant from the absolute point of view. For, our advaita teachers are very clear on this point. The necessity or otherwise for a God, the existence or otherwise of a God with superlative attributes all arise only in the mundane world which is after all only relatively real. As far as absolute truth is concerned only non-duality is true: namely, Truth is One and only One. You may call it God. But that God is not your God with superlative qualities. It is *Brahman*, the unqualified *Brahman*, to which there can be no attributes.

OT: Then why do all the scriptures say that everything in the universe owe their existence to God?

AV: They say it in the sense that all the movie pictures you see on the screen owe their existence to the screen. If the screen were not there there would be no pictures. This is the famous 'anvaya' logic. But the screen alone is always there, before the projection

of the pictures on it, during the projection and after the projection . So the screen is relatively more real than the pictures on it. It is in this sense that the scriptures including the Brahma Sutra say that *Brahman* is the source of everything.

SV: That portion of Brahma sutra is usually quoted to affirm that *Brahman* is the First Cause and is itself uncaused.

OT: In fact almost all scriptures say this. Krishna says: "*aham Adirhi madhyam ca* ..." in the tenth chapter of his *Gita*.

SV: Let us look at it in another way. Man is conscious of his limitations. It means he is capable of imagining or conceiving the infinite and in comparison he knows he has limitations that make him lack that infiniteness. It is that infiniteness he renames as God. It is a vague consciousness, no doubt. But it is that vague consciousness, I think, that brings religion as a vital need of man.

AV: The advaita teaching goes somewhat like this. It says that man has to rise from his limitations which are collectively termed as his avidyA. So long as he is subject to these limitations or avidya, he cannot dispense with religion or his belief in God.

PP: In other words advaita also tells you what to do in your world of duality.

OT: Only through the Grace of God does the saving knowledge of non-duality come to us. We have to resort to prayer and meditation to make ourselves worthy of God's Grace. Adi Shankara emphasizes this in almost all his devotional poems.

PP: Much research has been done to establish a strong connection between prayerful or meditative states and overall health as confirmed by physiological indicators.

DD: And that God to whom you do prayers can be your *ishTa-devatA* (favourite deity). I don't see anything wrong in it provided it does not carry with it hatred of any other God, either of Hinduism or of other religions.

PP: One can have preferences without exclusions. Hinduism is a graded religious discipline. It takes man step by step from the worship of the popular gods for gaining material ends all the way up to the prayer of the Jiva. This is the prayer which is keen on being led "from unreality to reality, from darkness to light and from death to immortality". One has to observe all forms of worship and go all the way with religion in order to arrive at a point beyond religion.

AV: Reason is strongest when it accepts divine guidance. This divine guidance does not necessarily have to come from a personality called God. Whenever we say 'personality' we think of it only in human form. We are not able to think of it as something which makes us think. This something which makes us think is the consciousness within us. This consciousness is actually what guides us. That is divine

guidance, not necessarily someone who is sitting there in the distant heavens and guiding every one of us.

DD: But then all those descriptions of Kailasa (the divine abode of Shiva) and Vaikuntha (the divine abode of *Vishnu*) must be taken to be mere imaginations. I for one would not want to accept your stand. The other schools of philosophy like Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita have no problems here, because for them the Ultimate God is personal and his abode is a real place. How can you say that advaita is the right view?

PP: As I have already said, there are levels of evolution among us all. There are some of us for whom nothing but the grossest form of a divinity has appeal. There are others among us for whom the most impersonal representation of that divinity is the only thing acceptable. There is no right or wrong here.

AV: No. It cannot be made that simple. Different presentations of the all-pervading divinity are true only in their respective spheres . There is only one reality from the transcendental point of view. For purposes of worship various names and forms are superimposed upon it. Note the word 'superimposed'. Once this process of giving a name and form to what in reality is nameless and formless starts, there is no end to it. We lay down all forms of worship and compose litanies in praise of Gods. We undertake pilgrimages to distant places to offer worship to deities in sacred shrines. All this is quite necessary in the case of ordinary men who choose to live in a world which takes multiplicity as real either as truth or as an unavoidable come-down. The true advaitin belongs to the latter category. He knows all this is MAyA but he cannot but do it. He knows he is sinning against his own enlightened state in doing all this. Appayya Dikshidar said: "Oh Lord I have in my weakness committed three sins and I beg forgiveness from you. To serve as a support for meditation I have given a form to the Highest who is really formless; I have tried to define the indefinable by composing stotras and litanies and lastly I have confined the omnipresent Lord to particular places of worship and have journeyed to those places". This is the attitude of a true advaitin towards all forms of worship. Whether each such form or for that matter the formless Ultimate was the first Cause or not does not make any difference to this attitude.

OT: I find it very difficult to accept that all the myriad deities in the various temples are part of the passing world of Maya. How come there have been so many theological discussions and stories about different manifestations and deities?

DD: I have always been confused about the relationships among the different Gods and Goddesses. The deity called ShAstA is the son of Shiva and Mohini, the feminine manifestation of *Vishnu*. So *Vishnu* is ShAstA's mother and Shiva is his father. So what is the relation of Lakshmi, the wife of *Vishnu*, to ShAstA? In fact this question was raised by the famous Appayya Dikshidar himself, whom you just quoted.

PP: Yes, the mythological set-up is certainly confusing if you take them all at their story-value. For instance, Shiva and Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning are brother and sister because they both emanated from the Supreme Mother Goddess in her

Mahalakshmi form. Like that *Vishnu* and Parvati are brother and sister. Brahma and Lakshmi are brother and sister. But Brahma himself emanated from Lord *Vishnu*. So Lakshmi is also the mother of Brahma. Can you take all these things literally in terms of our worldly language, imagery and relationships?

AV: The Vedic tradition seems to be contradicting itself if you look at it as if they were written by successive generations to elaborate differing theories. At one place it may say that the universe was created by God in the way in which a carpenter creates or constructs a work of art from his mind. At another place the same Vedas will declare that the entire universe came just out of the will-power of God. At another place it will raise the question: 'Who knows about this creation?'. Such writing if at all, reflects only a questioning intellectual mind which tries to present the truth to different levels of understanding. For the discerning mind the last word is that of the Upanishads. For example, to the question: Who is this Self, whom we desire to worship? Is he the Self by which we hear, see, etc.? Is he the heart and mind by which we perceive? The answer comes, just to cite one instance, in A.U. No, these are only adjuncts of the Self. The Self itself is Pure Consciousness. He is *Brahman*, He is God. He is Creator BrahmA, He is Indra, He is all Gods. The reality behind all the five elements, all that is born, everything that breathes, is *Brahman*, who is pure Consciousness. All creation and all the universe is established in Consciousness, they exist only through Consciousness, they work through Consciousness, their foundation is Consciousness. *Brahman* is Consciousness and Consciousness is *Brahman*. *PrajnAnaM Brahma.*

RNB: What appeals to me in all the scriptures is the repeated appeals for the purification of our mind. Without that basic requisite, everything else is only an academic exercise.

SV: What appeals to me most is the theory of the Causeless Cause of all causes. A cause and effect relationship can be entertained only when there is a feature that can clearly distinguish between the two and there is no such distinguishing feature in the case of *Brahman*. The maxim that says, as in the Mandukya-Karika, That which does not exist in the beginning and the end is equally so in the middle present, is the most wonderful statement that appeals to me.

PP: What appeals to me most is the universal human urge to be at all places at the same time, to know everything and to be always happy. These three urges may be summarized as 'to be', 'to know' and 'to be happy'. They are actual finite dim reflections of the essential infinite nature of *Brahman*, namely, existence, consciousness and bliss. These basic insitincts of man are also responsible for producing an innate fear of death, fear of ignorance and fear of misery.

OT: What appeals to me most is the fact that this Ultimate Reality that is *Brahman*, though incomprehensible to ordinary men like me, manifests itself as transcending everything, as immanent in everything and as the supreme perfection. All our *stotras* and *sahasranamas* with which we propitiate our deities at temples and in

homes repeatedly affirm only this transcendence, immanence and perfection of the ultimate God.

DD:The three qualities Transcendence, Immanence and Perfection appeal to me most.

AV: What appeals to me most is that these three qualities Transcendence, Immanence and Perfection constitute only the TIP of the Iceberg that is God. T for Transcendence, I for Immanence and P for Perfection. The Reality is far far beyond the TIP.

PP: Transcendence points to *Sat*, Immanence to *Chit* and Perfection to *Ananda* i.e., bliss. So the TIP is what points to *Sat-chid-Ananda*.

3. The Three Fundamental Urges of Man

To exist, to know and to enjoy – these are the three fundamental urges of man. In fact, all of man's desires, ambitions, aspirations and efforts are based on one or more of these fundamental motives. Certainly the most fundamental urge or instinct is, to be, to survive, to persist (as a being), to perpetuate oneself, to be ever present. It is not relevant to say that not everybody succeeds in this. The fact of this universal urge cannot be gainsaid. It is the urge that is systematically and meticulously sustained by the mother or the mother symbol. The second urge is to enquire, to understand, to investigate, to know and be all-knowing. No one can escape this urge though it may not manifest itself with the same intensity in all people. This urge is sustained, monitored and nurtured by the father (or the father symbol) who introduces one to the external world. The third urge is to enjoy, to be happy, to relax, to experience a satisfactory state. This is common to all human beings; in fact, in some of us it may go even to the extent of expressing itself as an urge to be perfect. Unlike the other two urges one does not find a motivator for this until one discovers one's spouse. It is the spouse who, in the long run, nurtures and monitors the urge to be happy and to enjoy. It is the spouse who shares all the happiness and thereby doubles it and who shares also all the unhappiness and thereby halves it.

Each of these has an infinite expression. The first one expresses itself as the Truth which is the Ultimate. It is the One which survives everything else. It is imperishable. It is the immutable anvil that remains the same whatever happens around, on, in, over, or beyond. It is the spark of everything that is animate or inanimate. It may be called, technically, the Spark of Immanence, because it is the Life of all Life, the Soul of all Souls. The infinite expression of the urge to know is Consciousness itself, infinite Intelligence. It is called *cit*. It is neither Knowledge alone, nor the Knower alone, nor the Known alone. It is all three in one. It is an indivisible triad. It is the ultimate Truth which lies beyond all knowledge as the Knower and beside whom everything else becomes the Object. It is always the Subject, which cannot be 'known' in the ordinary sense of the word. The infinite expression of the third urge, namely to be happy and to be perfect is *Ananda* , the eternal bliss. It is the eternal truth from which every spark of enjoyment and experience emanates.

These three urges form the fountainhead for every aspiration of man and its expression in terms of his behaviour and action. Whatever he does in this world is a consequence, direct or indirect, of one or more of these urges. He goes to school because he wants to know, he wants to earn a living by which he can live and, in due time, relax. He marries because he wants to lead a happy life with all its enjoyments. And so on. But all these three urges are just a finite limited version of their corresponding infinite versions, which are called the *sat, cit* and *Ananda.* This *sat-cid-Ananda* is the ultimate in any experience. It is called the Absolute Reality or the Transcendental Ultimate by Hindu Vedanta. Religion calls it God and gives it several familiar names. Almost right in the beginning of the *Gita*, the Lord refers to this as the indweller of the body (Sh*arIrI*) and gives it three connotations of Infinity: namely, *nitya* (eternal), *anASI* (endless) and *aprameya* (immeasurable). This is how it differs from the Finite which is familiar to our experience. It is eternal whereas anything that is finite is not; it is endless whereas the finite has always an end; and, finally, the infinite is immeasurable or uncountable whereas everything that is finite is either measurable or countable. And the Lord when referring to this Infinite Transcendental Absolute, indicates its *sat, chit, Ananda* facets in three different contexts. The first comes out almost right at the beginning of the exposition. *What is not can never be; What is can never not be* (II – 16).:

na asato vidyate bhAvo na abhAvo vidyate sataH

He confirms it again in X –20*: I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings.*

aham AdiSca madhyam ca bhUtAnAm anta eva ca

He hints at the *cit* aspect of His Personality in II – 46: *The One who has known Brahman, to him all these vedas and other knowledge are just like a cupful of water before an ocean*.

yAvan artha udapAne sarvatas-samplutodake/
tAvAn sarveshu vedeshu brAhmaNasya vijAnataH //

The *Ananda* aspect comes out in His declaration: *Arjuna, I have nothing to do or get done in the three worlds in this life; I have nothing to obtain which I have not obtained* … (III – 22)

na me pArtha asti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kimca na /
na anavAptam avAptavyam … //

thereby implying that his bliss or satisfaction is full.

The *advaita* Vedanta has this to say on *sat-cidAnanda*. When a man wakes from deep sleep it is natural for him to exclaim: I slept happily. Who is this ‘I’ that slept happily? It is not the mind, because it was not active at the time when the ‘I’ was sleeping. It is not the one that recalls the happiness of the sleep, because it did not experience the happiness. Only the experiencer can recall the experience. The experiencer is the ‘I’. Actually the experiencer is the lower ‘I’, the false ‘I’. The real ‘I’, i.e., the higher ‘I’,

simply watches the experience of the lower 'I'. The real 'I' is the Immutable Reality. It does not go through any change or experience. But it always 'watches'. It is the '*sAkshi*' . It is the *sat-cidAnanda* Reality. The lower 'I' goes and 'touches' it, as it were, during deep sleep and this is an everyday experience for the lower 'I'. That is why it is able to say 'I slept happily', after every awakening from deep sleep. Here there are three assertions made, all rolled into one. The word 'happily' indicates there is an *Ananda* (pleasure, happiness, joy) which was experienced during sleep; it is actually a recall of the association with the Ananda of the real 'I'. The word 'I' indicates the continuity of existence between the state of sleep and the state of waking. The word 'slept' indicates an awareness or the knowledge (= *cit*) of sleep, the awareness belonging to the witness to the sleep, namely, the real 'I'. In dreamless sleep were we conscious or not.? We feel we were not conscious. **But that is a feeling we have *after* waking from sleep**. We do not do so in sleep itself. That in us which now feels that in sleep we were not conscious is our mind. It was not present in our sleep and so it is natural for it to be ignorant of the consciousness there was in sleep. Not having experienced sleep it is unable to remember what it was like and makes mistakes about it. The state of deep sleep is beyond the mind. Consciousness was present then as consciousness. It is because of that consciousness we are able to say that we were not aware of anything then. In a dark room we are not able to see anything but still we have the awareness that we are not able to see anything; for this awareness no external light is necessary.

This three-fold presentation of Reality, as *sat*, *cit* and *Ananda* is also reflected in the most important *mantra* of Hinduism, namely, the *GAyatrI*. The three lines of the *GAyatrI* mean, literally:

That – of the Originator – Most excellent;
Light – of God – Let us meditate;
Intellects – He who – Our – May prompt.

The word *savituH (*= of the Originator*)* in the first line, which indicates 'Origin' or 'Birth', suggests Creation and makes it characteristic of the '*sat*' or the '*satya*' facet of the Absolute Reality. This line is a glorification of the Absolute. A glorification of a deity simply praises the Lord as Lord, does not ask for anything and does not do anything in the wake of that praise. It is like a subordinate visiting his superior (or a party worker visiting his leader) purely for courtesy and simply offering words of praise without expecting anything to be done by the superior. The first line of the *GAyatrI* does simply this.

The second line asks us to meditate as if it is the be-all and end-all of life. Yes, because the meditation itself gives the bliss, immanent in the Absolute Reality. Meditation on the Absolute is communion with or worship of, the Divine. It is therefore the Worship aspect of the *mantra*. It corresponds to the *Ananda* (or the *ananta*, infinite) aspect of the Absolute; because the very meditation of the Absolute is Bliss. Bliss is not something that you attain after you have achieved something as a reward from the Lord. To think of Him is Bliss!

The use of the words *dhiyah* (= intellects) and *pracodayAt* (= may prompt or guide) in the third line show that this line is indicative of the *cit* facet of Reality and is also the Prayer aspect of the *mantra* imbedded in the *gAyatri.* It is the *cit* (Knowledge, *jnAnaM*) facet of the *sat-cid-Ananda* form or the *satyam-jnAnaM-anantam* definition of *Brahman*. It is significant that in this line it is the intellect that asks for the prompting of the Absolute and that is why this line is the *cit* facet. A deeper enquiry into the meaning of the *mantra* will take us into the analysis of the state of sleep and our memory of it. In fact the *sat-cid-Ananda* form is our true nature, though we don't know it. But every day when we go to sleep and come back with the memory of a happy sleep, it is because we have gone and touched that true nature of us without our own volition.

The three lines together, of the *GAyatrI* incorporate, in a sense, the three-fold universal practice of all Religion, namely, **Glorification of the super-natural, Worship of the Supra-mental and Prayer to The All-mighty**. Thus the three lines of the *GAyatrI* represent the three different types of propitiation of the absolute.

Can the Finite reach the Infinite? Vedanta says it can. The Infinite which is *sat-cidAnanda* can be reached by the finite human being if proper efforts are made by him. To reach the Infinite is the goal of all beings according to the scriptures. This is the goal referred to as *moksha*. Once the finite reaches the Infinite, there is no coming back to the finite state. In other words, there is no more birth and death. This reaching the Infinite has to be effected through a proper discipline of the mind. That which IS, by its very nature, is beyond time. Thinking by the mind by its very nature involves a sequence of points in time. Therefore thinking is finite and awareness sparked by this thinking is only of finite objects. It means therefore that in order to contact the infinite , one must go beyond the thought process. That which *is,* has then to be taken hold of only by the non-action of the thinking function. The mind must be emptied of all its contents in order that its true nature – awareness – may be revealed. At present it is always entangled with some thought so that awareness by itself is lost in that thought. The self disappears in that ego-thought and the outer 'I' mistakes the object for the subject – irrespective of whether the object be the world outside or the thought inside. Thus the mind is the villain within oneself.

That the mind is the powerful villain of the piece is frankly presented by Arjuna himself in his question to Krishna in the sixth chapter of the Gita (6 -34):

***canchalaM** hi manaH kRshNa **pramAthi balavat dRDhaM** /*
tasyAhaM nigrahaM manye vAyor-iva sudushkaraM//
Restless indeed is the mind, Oh Krishna, it is **dizzy**,
strong, and **unconquerable**. I deem it as hard to control as the wind.

Restless like the deer, but the latter is harmless.
Dizzy like the mosquito, but the latter is not strong.
Strong like a tiger, but the latter can be starved and tamed.
But mind's strength increases, like a leech, by starvation
So it is **unconquerable**.

The most villainous part of the mind is however, the ego. This is the source of all problems. In every one of our actions and thoughts, we have to watch this ego. We have to fight it to minimise its influence. In fact we have to carry on this internal struggle endlessly. This is the Way. The vast majority of people may think of another way or in a variety of other ways. But history has shown us again and again that the mass mind is very amenable to suggestion and regimentation, and can be influenced by appeals to lower instincts, narrow prejudices and baser instincts. It is this mass mind that has made religion a formal affair, a matter of routine and elaborate paraphernalia. Instead of experience, spirituality and love, the mass mind is blinded by dogmatic belief, scholastic learning and charitable work, respectively and mistakes the latter for the former. Our material uplift and the scientific and socio-economic efforts to improve it further is only making us more and more outward looking, superficial and cut off from the only source of strength, peace and wisdom which exists in every one of us. These limitations and illusions of the mind have to be cast off. Only in the innermost depths of our consciousness can we realise the whole Truth in all its Perfection, Immanence and Transcendence. The real life of man begins only when he transcends all his animal attributes and capacities, desires, emotions, concrete thoughts and physical needs and starts living in this (his own) higher level of being.

There is no other Way, declare the scriptures. '*na anyah panthA ayanAya vidyate'* -- meaning, to reach salvation there is no other way. Constant chanting of the *GAyatrI*, in the manner of a disciplined japa and continuous meditation on its meaning will clear the way for us by consuming the accumulated dirt in our minds. This cleansing of the mind will result in a crystal-clear mind, by the Grace of God, and in that mind one can see the spotless reflection of the Almighty Supreme, say the Seers. This is the way the Finite may reach the Infinite and then there exists only the Infinite; never more the Finite.

4. Detachment, the King-pin Prescription

The attitude of detachment is the essential core of what goes by the name of *karma yoga*, the yoga of selfless, dedicated action. This attitude is the lesson that philosophy teaches us. From the innumerable stories of the *purANas* and our everyday experience, we note that whenever, for instance, there is an irresoluble dilemma in life, death or its equivalent, we tend to philosophize. This resort to philosophy is not for a psychological satisfaction, nor is it an attempt at helpless compromise with reality. It is in fact the only means to get to the root of the matter. In the classical case where Arjuna presents his dilemma to Krishna on the battlefield and collapses, the first thing that Krishna does is to recall to him the nature of the *Atman*. Krishna says: 'You are grieving about something that ought not to be grieved about, neither these kith and kin of yours nor you as Arjuna are everlasting'. 'Go about in the world', says Krishna, 'fully conscious of the fact that you are the *Atman,* and therefore you can never be tarnished by these feelings of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, friendship and enmity. *Be completely detached as if you were an actor on the stage.* An actor does not hesitate to 'kill' his bosom friend who is playing the part of the enemy on the stage'. 'Detachment' does not imply ineffectiveness as some critics would have it. Only when you are completely detached can you do a job without being confused by excitement. This does not mean that you are not involved. Certainly

you are. As an actor on the stage you have to be involved with everything that goes on there and especially with the part you play; and you must play it well. Even if you have to be angry on the stage, you have to be; but the real You - whatever you are outside the stage - is not angry. This is *karma yoga*. You are acting in the world according to the role given to you, according to your *sva-Dharma* (= one's own duty) , and performing it effectively, never for a moment forgetting the fact, that it is your duty to act without expecting anything out of it. The thief in the play who is stealing currency notes (real notes, that is) can never for a moment believe that the currency will stay with him, the real him!. So the *gIta* says: 'Do your duty, don't be attached to the outcome thereof.'

What does it mean 'not to be attached'? The *Gita* describes what happens after 'attachment'. (*B.G.*: 2- 62, 63):

sangAt-samjAyate kAmah kAmAt-krodho'bhijAyate /
krodhAd-bhavati sammohaH sammohAt-smRti-vibhramah /
smRtibramSAd-buddhi-nASaH buddhi nASAt-praNaSyati //

Anxious desire follows attachment; the (non-fulfillment of) that desire leads to anger; only one step away is delusion, followed by a confusion of intellect; and this leads to the failure of intellect; and thereafter, disaster.

The effort therefore should be to overcome these consequences of attachment and that is what one means 'not to be attached'. If a person can go about one's duties for the sake of duty and not claim authorship, ownership or doership for oneself then one will not be subject to the experience of resultant pleasure or pain. Neither the good results nor the bad results of his actions would bind him. *So long as any actions bind him he has to return to the cycle of transmigration. The ultimate purpose is to see that neither the good nor the bad keeps us in bondage*. That is why we are advised to be detached.

Total detachment does not mean asceticism. Poverty is not the pre-requisite for purity. Asceticism usually is taken to mean retiring to the forest and seeking a communion with the divine in the serenity of the silence there. This is certainly a worthwhile goal but this is not prescribed for the millions who cannot but toil in the humdrum world of *samsAra.* Hinduism has different prescriptions for different levels of seekers. Retiring to the forest as an ascetic is prescribed for those who are ready for the fourth stage of life. For the millions of us, when the scriptures say 'be detached' they mean 'have a detached attitude'. It is the attitude that matters, not the physical act of renuciation. The physical act of renunciation, if it is not simultaneously accompanied by the a complete cessation of the feeling of attachment to anything that binds, is only hypocrisy (*Gita,* 3 - 6):

karmendriyANi samyamya ya Aste manasA smaran /
indriyArthAn vimUDhAtmA mithyAcAras-sa ucyate //

The one of deluded understanding who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the sense objects, is called a hypocrite.

On the other hand, being in the world, if you go about its affairs with a feeling of detachment, that is exactly what is wanted of a seeker who is a householder. *Karma yoga* recognizes that the real evil is not in the physical possessions themselves but in the attachment to them. It is not the ordinary duties involved in the process of earning a livelihood that should be abhorred, but selfishness - which is a consequence of attachment to the non-Self. It is this that should be suppressed and ultimately conquered. It is in this sense that Krishna advises Arjuna to fight the battle rather than show attachment and compassion to his fellow-men and retire. Krishna makes a remarkable statement in this strain, which must be engraved in gold: (*Gita*, 3-30):

mayi sarvANi karmANi sanyasy-AdhyAtma-cetasA /
nirASir-nirmamo bhUtvA yudhyasva vigata-jvaraH //

Renouncing all actions unto Me, with the mind centred on the Self, without any desire and without any ego, go and fight, without any fever (of excitement).

It is significant to note that one has to 'fight' *without desire, without ego and without excitement!* When interpreted for the common man this means: *Do carry on your life's journey doing all your duties without selfishness, without the fever and excitement that you normally show in chasing happiness and satisfaction.* How is this possible? It should be made possible. That is *karma yoga*.

Social service done as a dedication to society without the least self-interest, and in a totally detached attitude of self-effacement, such action goes by the fascinating name of *yajna*, in Hinduism. The word *yajna,* is one of those words from Hindu religion and spirituality which has no English equivalent. Roughly, it means sacrifice, either ritualistic in the conventional sense of Hindu orthodoxy, or a devotional act without an egocentric attachment. In a broader sense, any action done for the good of others, done with dedication and without desire or expectation or attachment or selfishness may be called a *yajna*. Here 'dedication' means 'voluntary acceptance of suffering for the benefit of others'. The concept is elaborately dealt with in the third chapter of the *Gita*. The central purport is as follows.

When one acts, one has to take responsibility for the good or bad effects of the action. Dexterity in action (*karmasu kauSalaM*) according to the *Gita*, is that manner of involvement in action in which the effects do not bind one in terms of *AgAmi karma*. Only when one has desire for the fruits thereof, is one bound by the implications of one's action. When one performs an action because it is one's duty to do it, as for example, when a judge sentences a criminal to death, the results of the action do not bind the judge. The judge does not incur any sin meting out a death sentence as part of his duty. This is *yajna.* The *Gita* urges that every action must be done in a spirit of *yajna*. That is the way to be involved in action and at the same time be free from the bondage of action. The ultimate aim being the eradication of all *vAsanAs,* quality-imprints of thoughts and actions of all past lives and the past in the present life,both good and bad, from the mind-complex, one has to discover the right way to act in the living world, a way which does

not result in the accumulation of further *vAsanAs*. The initial attempt in one's journey should be to avoid accumulating bad *vAsanAs*, that is, to stay away from sinful acts. To live in subservience to the calls and appetites of othe outer world is the origin of all sins. Such subservience contributes to 'inhuman' and 'undivine' *vAsanAs* piling up in the mind. From *vAsanAs* to thoughts and from thoughts to actions is a very familiar chain. To break it, one has to substitute the evil *vAsanAs* by divine *vAsanAs* which arise out of *puNya-karma*, the *karma* which arises out of compassion and dedicated devotion to the divine and the universal brotherhood of man. This substitution is not a simple process. One may think of the mind-complex as a large reservoir of *vAsanAs*, the contents of which cannot be poured out. So in order to 'substitute' good *vAsanAs* for bad ones, all one can do is really to 'pour' more and more good *vAsanAs* into the reservoir and dilute its badness.

Punya karmas will create *vAsanAs* which will gradually overwhelm the pattern of sin that exists in the mind. The *Gita* gives us a clear recipe for exactly this breaking of the *vAsanA*-thought-action chain which takes us down the scale of *samsAra*. The *Gita* says: 'Do your assigned duty and do it in the spirit of *yajna*'. That is, do your duty because you have to do it. It is not important to do what you want to do but rather it is important to begin to like to do what you have to do. Do it without desire. Do it as if it were a part you have to play and you have no stake in your part. The real stakes are beyond the play. Within the play one should have no desire or attachment. This is the spirit of *yajna.*

The alchemy of the *yajna* attitude of even ordinary acts to a larger cause, be it as concrete as one's mother at home, or as unsubstantial as God in heaven, or as abstract as any impersonal noble cause, has to be experienced to be believed. It confirms the recurring emphasis in the scriptures on the importance of correct attitudes. Therefore it is the attitude with which you approach your *karma* that is important, rather than the *karma* itself. It is precisely this train of argument that Lord Krishna uses in urging Arjuna to fight and not to retreat. Arjuna is immersed in the disease of false identification with the eternal world of 'his' kith and kin, says Krishna. Neither they nor he are permanent everlasting entities and so there is no sense in crying over the possible death of what is destined to die. If he identified himself with his Self, which is what he ought to do, then neither the heat and cold of the external world nor the alternatives of pleasure and pain of the mental world would affect him. His right is only to the action and not to the results thereof. Equanimity concerning success or failure is the yoga for him. Not to retreat from a war already declared is the *svaDharma* of the Kshatriya that he is. If he thinks that retreating to solitude, renouncing the world, would give him peace, he is mistaken -- for, the attitude with which he renounces is the deciding factor. If the attitude is not that of a *jnAni* who has attained enlightenment, but is that of an emotionally charged warrior whose compassion for his kith and kin has got the better of him, then such a meolodramatic withdrawal from the world would not bring peace; for the mind would continue to be in turmoil in the vortex of its worldly attachments. It does not have the maturity of dispassion that should precede renunciation. Doing what is assigned to one as one's duty is far more honourable than running away from action in dislike of that action. If one does one's duty in the spirit of *yajna*, the actions do not bind one.

The whole universe, says Krishna, is a complex of mutual *yajnas*. When the world was re-created by the Lord at the beginning of the *kalpa*, He created divine beings to be in charge of the elements and ordained that human beings should propitiate these gods to ensure that the elements behave properly. These *yajnas* thus give rise to a complex ecological cycle. *Yajna* sustains the normal behaviour of the elements. The latter in turn sustains the fertility and usefulness of the environment in which we live, which sustains humanity, whose duty it is to perform the different *yajnas* enjoined on them. This cycle started by the Lord at the time of creation cannot be interrupted except at the peril of the collapse of the system itself.

Reality cannot be put into watertight pigeonholes and described as only this and not that. Action and non-action are relative concepts. When the whole world is awake and full of activity, for the enlightened man who ceases to be involved in it, it is the calm of the night, to borrow the imagery of the *Gita*. When the whole world is ignorant of the presence of the Cosmic Power and is therefore asleep, it is the Wise Enlightened Being who is awake; for Him the Absolute Light is radiating with all its brilliance and it is he who is enjoying the permanent bliss of wisdom and light (B.G. 2 – 69):

yA niSa sarva-bhUtAnAm tasyAM jAgarti samyamI /
yasyAM jagrati bhUtAni sA niSa paSyato muneH //

So who is asleep, who is awake? Hindu literature abounds in such contrasts. The rhetoric of the presentation is only to bring home to us the relative nature of every experience. Karma Yoga therefore derives its strength and sanction from a thorough understanding of what is everlasting and what is transient.

A *karma yogi* goes about the world in the full awareness that the action he performs pertains to the external world to which he is duty bound to respond, whereas his Internal Self is totally unaffected by anything that happens to his physical or mental self. He is happy within himself , having cast off the desires arising in his mind. Neither desire nor fear nor anger can upset him. He is not overwhelmed by grief nor is he excited by pleasure. He receives experiences as they come - be they plesurable or sorrowful. The one does not enthuse him nor the other depress him,. Just as a tortoise withdraws his head and all its limbs under its shell, he withdraws his sense organs from their objects of enjoyment. Having seen the Absolute, he has no taste for the trivialities of sense perception. Such a person goes about the world desireless, rid of all egoistic concepts of mine and thine, ever peaceful and happy. He is called a *sthita-prajna*, one of firm wisdom. It is the description of this ecstatic stage of human experience that prompts Arjuna to ask again and again whether he should not therefore withdraw from action. The answer comes, as we have seen, in the form of a paradox. He who physically runs away for fear of involvement has not really run away because his egoism has taken hold of him. But he who is still in the world but does his duty with an attitude of total detachment is the one who has really renounced the world.

To sum up, *karma yoga* is selfless desireless action -- action, for all purposes, done exactly as would be done by a person who is totally involved and attached. The difference is only in the mental attitude of the doer. Service to society done this way is

Service to God. Service to elders, parents and ancestors is a duty in which one engages oneself not for reward but for the discharge of an obligation or debt. *NishkAma-karma* (desireless action) performed in this way leads to the purification of the mind. *VAsanAs*, imprinted in the mind for ages, can be eradicated only by desireless action.Give all you can but never ask for the fruit.

The attitude of doing one's duty for its own sake is the heritage of Hindu culture, handed down from generation to generation. Even those Hindus who are not educated or scholarly, even those who come from very deprived environments, understand this concept. The rationale of all this lies in the fact that even an apparently imperfect or faulty action does not contaminate one when it is done without any desire or selfishness. No action, for that matter, is perfect. Imperfections will always be there in any action. But the imperfect element will not affect the doer if he is totally unselfish. We have already cited the example of a judge sentencing a criminal to death. Another dramatic example is that of a three-month old infant kicking its mother. Does it leave any *vAsanA* of sin in the doer? On the other hand, if the same child grows into an adult of 20 and now, in ungrateful anger, kicks his mother, there is a difference. The action is the same, but the attitude is different. The one taints the mind and the other does not. This is what our scriptures mean when they say that actions done without selfishness or desire will not bind you. such actions are the summum bonum of *karma* yoga. To one who believes in the scriptures, gods and the myths associated with them, dedication of all actions to God would come naturally. For instead of arguing about what is detchment, what is non-action and action and so on, all he does is to simply think of God as the director of all his thoughts and deeds and dedicate them to Him. then the alchemy which we have mentioned earlier takes over and the several imperfections that are bound to have been there in the beginning will all disappear in due time and *karma yoga* will then become a second nature. And then, and only then, will every action performed by him be a *yajna*.

5. Five Cardinal Virtues

The first and foremost thing to attempt in Man's long journey to Divine Perfection is to acquire certain cardinal virtues. The *Gita* lists these virtues and classifies them as divine characteristics:

abhayaM satva-samSuddhir-jnAna-yoga-vyavasthitiH /
dAnaM damaSca yajnaSca svAdhyAyas-tapa-ArjavaM //
ahimsA satyaM akrodhas-tyAgaH SAntir-apaiSunaM /
dayA bhUtesh-valoluptvaM mArdavaM hrIr-acApalaM //
tejaH kshamA dhRtiH SaucaM adroho nAtimAnitA/

Fearlessness, Purity of heart, steadfastness in the ascent to the Divine, charity, sense-control, sacrifice, study of scriptures, asceticism, straightforwardness, non-violence, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion to beings, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickle-mindedness, vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride.

Five of these have been repeatedly emphasized, by expositors of *sanAtana Dharma*, as all-embracing. These are:

PURITY, (*Shaucha*)
SELF-CONTROL, (*Shama & dama*)
DETACHMENT, (*nissangatvam*)
TRUTH, (*satyaM*)
NON-VIOLENCE (*ahimsA*)

The first three pertain to the individual. The last two are social virtues.

Each of these must be very broadly interpreted. For example, PURITY is external as well as internal. So in addition to cleanliness it encompasses such qualities as straightforwardness, frankness, innocence, absence of envy or of pride or of malice, absence of crookedness, gentleness and modesty.

SELF-CONTROL is the rooting out of the sins of the flesh and of the mind. Observe that flesh is not suppressed but only put in its place. Keeping impure thoughts away is the major part of the control of the mind. If one can be master of one's mind, if one can direct the mind to think what one wants to think and not allow it to think what it likes to think about, then one may be said to have self-control. What is important is who is occupying the driver's seat in this vehicle of journey through life. Making one's mind the servant rather than the master is not suppression. One might be tempted to say: 'Allowing the mind and body to have their way, will rid us of all inhibitions and will give us complete relaxation, thus relieving us of all tensions. But tension is again a state of the nervous system and the nervous system is not what we inherently are. It is external to us and any time we allow something external to us to tell us what we have to do, we have lost self-control. And this disease of being controlled by things external to us, the 'us' that we really are, is a worse disease than the so-called disease of suppression. Slavishness to the vagaries of the mind is the entry visa to hell. On the other hand the discipline of self-control brings us the prescription of the supreme alchemy of the divine urge. 'Discipline' and 'Suppression' should be carefully distinguished. To follow the discipline of driving on the lawfully correct side of the road cannot be called a disease of suppression of the urge to drive 'as we like'! To train oneself in this discipline of self-control, Hinduism, like other religions, prescribes fasts, penances and certain routines which are necessary exercises for this discipline. Note that the broad discipline of self-control embraces qualities like patience, forbearance, modesty, humility, self-sacrifice, self-effacement, sense-control, and, last but not least, absence of anger, of hatred and of pride.

The next virtue, DETACHMENT, has already been elaborated upon at length in the previous section. It can be easily misunderstood. Recall that detachment is freedom from attachment to anything that is transient. It is the cessation of the feeling of attachment to anything that is not you. Anything that is yours is not you. So detachment means non-attachment to one's external possessions, as well as to one's body and mind; in fact one should not be attached even to one's opinions, which is perhaps the most difficult attachment to discard. Such detachment comes from an absence of egoism. Identification of oneself with the external body, external action, external pleasure and pain is egoism. The only identification that is enjoined is that with the inner Self, *Atman*. Other

identifications which is what happens most of the time, is the reason for all miseries. So detachment is a cardinal virtue which has to be gradually cultivated. The methodology is to intellectually analyze 'Who am I' and get rid of all trace of attachment to anything that is not 'I'. But all this is theoretical. What is the practical way to be detached and at the same time not fail in one's responsibilities to oneself and to society? For this the *Gita* gives the extraordinary recipe, the cultivation of the *yajna* attitude.

The next cardinal virtue is TRUTH. It is the most important of the five cardinal virtues. It is so important that the scriptures proclaim again and again that *Dharma* is rooted in *satya* (=Truth) and sustained by *satya*. Truth is not mere truth-speaking; it includes all forms of truth, beauty and perfection, any just cause, right action and a life of virtue. This broad interpretation of truth that Hinduism revels in talking about is so encompassing that the *purANas* are full of episodes which illustrate the numerous dilemmas that present themselves to the pursuer of truth. Whether at such and such a time a certain choice of action among several options available is the right one from the point of view of Hindu *Dharma* and the principle of truth, is a recurring theme in Hindu mythology. The *itihAsas* (Ramayana and Mahabharata) abound in elaborate discussions of such situations and of the *Dharma-sankaTa* (the difficult predicament of choice regarding *Dharma*) involved in such problems. These discussions turn out to be equally valid even in the context of modern times and this is why these two epics are so valuable more than 25 centuries after they were composed.

Here are some specific injunctions from the various secondary scriptures which give us some idea of the sweep of the importance of Truth:

satyaM brUyAt priyaM brUyAt na brUyAt satyam-apriyaM /
priyaM ca nAnRtaM brUyAt esha Dharmas-sanAtanaH //

Speak what is true, speak what is pleasant; speak not what is true but unpleasant; nor what is pleasant but not true ; this is the tradition of *Dharma*.

In the Ramayana King Dasaratha promises to the sage Visvamitra on welcoming him that he (the King) is at the sage's service and whatever he wants will be done. But when the latter wants the son Rama to be sent along with him to protect his *yajnas* from the demons, the father Dasaratha demurs. The preceptor Vasishta advises him as follows (V.R. 1-21-8):

pratiSrutya karishyeti uktam vAkyam akurvataH /
ishTA-pUrta-vadho bhUyAt tasmAd Ramam visarjaya //

Loss of merit accrued from sacrifices and noble works will cause if you fail to redeem the promise made, having solemnly declared that you will do it. Therefore send Rama .

Here is again, Rama to Sage Jabali who, in order to support Bharata, deliberately played the Devil's Advocate to bring back Rama from the forest : (V.R.: 2-108-12,13):

udvijante yathA sarpAt narAd anRta-vAdinaH /
DharmaH satya paro loke mUlam sarvasya cocyate //
satyam-eveSvaro loke satye DharmaH sadASritaH /
satya-mUlAni sarvANi satyAn-nAsti paraM padaM //

People turn away in fear from a man telling lies just as they do from a serpent. *Dharma* has its culmination in truthfulness; it is in fact declared to be the root of all.Truth alone is God in the world, *Dharma* ever hinges on truth. All have their root in truth; there is no goal higher than truth

Even the devil has to quote scriptures! Listen to Queen Kaikeyi blackmailing King Dasaratha into agreeing to send Rama to the forest, by cornering him in the name of adherence to Truth: (V.R., 2 - 14 - 6, 7):

saritAm tu patiH svalpAM maryAdAM satyam-anvitaH /
satyAnurodhAt samaye velAm svAM nAtivartate //
satyam-eka-padam brahma satye DharmaH pratishTitaH /
satyam-evAkshayA vedAH satyenA-vApyate paraM //

Wedded to truthfulness the ocean for its part does not even at the time of flow-tide transgress its limits because of its respect for truth.Truth is *Brahman* denoted by the mono-syllabic OM; Dharma is rooted in Truth. The immortal vedas represent Truth alone. The Supreme is attained through Truthfulness.

The entire Ramayana story hinges on the single resolution of Rama based on his obligation to carry out his father's word, come what may; here he is seen consoling Lakshmana who could not tolerate the injustice done to the Lord by the father: (V.R., 2 - 22 - 9):

satyas-satyA-bhisandhaSca nityam satya-parAkramaH /
paraloka-bhayAd-bhIto nirbhayo'stu pitA mama //

Let my father, who is ever truthful, true to his promise, truly valiant and afraid of falsehood be rid of fear (in the other world)

Here is Sanatkumara, the divine sage, sermonising to King Dhritarashtra on the latter's specific questions to him on Immortality: (*mahA-bhArata*, udyoga-parva, SanatsujAtIyam, 2-30):

satyAtmA bhava rAjendra satye lokAH pratishTitAH /
tAmstu satya-mukhAn-AhuH satye hyamRtam-AhitaM//

Oh King, Be full of Truth, all the worlds are established in Truth. All of them are said to be dependent on Truth for their survival. In Truth lies *moksha*.

One of the most important divine descents was when the Lord appeared as *nara-simha* (half-man-half-lion) to bless the boy Prahlada. God appeared at that time from the pillar in that fashion, says Vyasa, the author of the *BhA.*, to prove true the words of his favourite: (*BhA.*, 7 - 8 - 18): *satyam vidhAtum nija-bhRtya-bhAshitam*

The favourite whose words He had to prove true was not just the boy-devotee Prahlada. He had with infinite confidence in the Lord declared a little while before that God is everywhere and he certainly sees Him in the pillar indicated by the father HiraNya-kaSipu. That was certainly to be vindicated. But there was more. Brahma the Creator had given the demon an unusual boon that he will not meet his death with either a man or an animal, with anything created by the Creator or not, with any weapon, the death will not occur either inside or outside, day or night, either on earth or above in the sky, either by the living or non-living, or by the demigods. All this had to be simultaneously vindicated. The complicated *Avatara* of the Lord had to be that way in order to establish so many facets of *satya*! (Also see the Section on Prahlada charitam in the chapter 'Gems from Shrimad BhA.').

From the Tamil *tirukkuRaL*:(No.292) :

poymaiyum vAymai iDatta purai tIrnda
nanmai payakkum enin /

If the result can be an unadulterated good,
even untrue words can be considered as truthful.

Also see the interesting episode (in the Chapter on 'Thre Triad of Sundarakandas) in the *sundarakANDa* of Valmiki Ramayana where the Rakshasis go to Sita and ask her who this monkey is, with whom she was seen conversing, she replies that she does not know him.

NON-VIOLENCE, *ahimsA*, the fifth cardinal virtue, is a social virtue which is usually not well understood, even in the country of its origin and in the country which mothered the greatest apostle of non-violence who ever lived. Non-violence is a concept which is not binary, that is, there is nothing like, 'This is nonviolence and that is not'. It is a continuous concept, like, say, temperature. It is a whole spectrum of qualities; there are shades and shades of violence and non-violence. Just as absolute Truth or absolute Purity is an ideal, absolute Non-violence is also an ideal. Naturally there can be degrees of non-violence. What is recommended is that one should move closer and closer to that ideal. As a consequence, the spectrum of the allied concept of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism also varies from the extreme of cannibalism to the other extreme of not even breathing plain, unfiltered air lest you hurt the germs in it!

QUESTION: If you are a stickler regarding vegetarianism, what is your logic to make a distinction between plants and animals? Both have life!

It doesn't need unusual intelligence to recognize that animals have an extra dimension of sentience than plants. But more than that. Here is something which the animals themselves would put forth as their plea!. You cut a plant and eat it ; the remaining thing

left on its roots sprouts again and it grows. You cut one leg of a lamb, but the remaining three legs remain as three for ever; the fourth leg never grows!The concept of non-violence has its roots in the Hindu theory that every life is a spark of the divine and our recognition of the divine must be so universal as to identify ourselves with this divinity in every living being., and therefore, the least harm that you can do to life is all that is permitted. The ideal state of non-violence may never be reached. Eating plant food is also a kind of harm done to the plant world. In consonance with this , Hindu rituals prescribe various compensatory, repentant rites as a daily chore, for the several explicit and implicit killings that we cannot do without in our day-to-day lives. It is in this context that the practice of vegetarianism varies from region to region in the country and from one level of society to another. In fact, the higher you consider yourself in the cosmic evolution to spiritual perfection, the nearer you would yourself like to be to the ideal of non-violence.

A delicate balance has to be attempted. Earth is the most concrete form of expression of Nature through its five elements. These five elements themselves - earth, water, fire, air and space - are nothing but expressions of the same divinity. This expression is what is technically known as *prakRti*. So for worship, we take the most concrete form of *prakRti* and that is why, the linga and the *salagRama* risen from earth are worshipped the 'forms' bordering on the 'formless'. Plants are the next in evolution from this concrete form of *prakRti*. But still they have no soul. Animals have a soul. So they should not be killed. Eating plant food with proper discipline is called vegetarianism. Even among plant food there are taboos from the point of view of *sAtvic* food! In sum the understanding of the concept of non-violence is dependent on the extent of one's conviction about the identity of all living beings. The nearer one is to this conviction the more non-violent one is likely to be. It is this attitude of identity that matters. The amount of violence that one cannot but do without in one's own life depends upon the intensity of identity with all beings that one feels or can train oneself to feel. This coupled with various traditions and sociological habits that different regions of the country have evolved for themselves in tune with their environment, results in different practices of so-called vegetarianism in the different geographical areas of the world.

It is true that the *PurANA*s and *itihAsa*s speak of meat-eating even by the brahmins of tht society. There are records of such traditions. Because of these traditions historians have been distracted to think of vegetarianism as a later interpolation into Hinduism. It is here that the emphasis on attitudes has to be taken into account. The scriptures say, for instance, whatever is offered to the Lord with intense devotion, is acceptable to Him. The natural mischievous rejoinder by the modern intellectual is: what if I offer an animal? Is this the justification for animal sacrifice? The story of the great Kannappar who offered meat to the Lord and became a model of devotion, is cited. But what was the attitude of Kannappar in that context? He was ready to pluck his only remaining eye for the sake of donating it to the Lord, even though he was already blind by one eye which he had just plucked and offered to Him!. The attitude in this case of extreme devotion was obvious and the blessing of the Lord was automatic.

It is also true that in vedic times there were animal sacrifices and these were part of certain rituals, which had been vogue almost till the beginning of the twentieth century. But it was merely because of the misue of these that a Buddha had to appear on the scene and wean people away from their other-worldly ambitions and make them concentrate on compassion, sympathy and non-violence as one's basic Dharma. It was because of the misdirected emphasis on the ritualistic sacrifices still persisting even after the Buddha's time, that a Shankara appeared and emphasized the transience of every benefit whether of this world or of the other world and led everybody on to think in terms of their upward path of evolution rather than keep circling in the quagmire of the cycle of births and deaths.

Every one must cultivate these five cardinal virtues in all their generality. As one rises in the ladder of perfection of these virtues, one will find that one's own concepts and dimensions of these virtues begin to embrace everything that has been enjoined to be good by all the religions of the world. The simultaneous effort to suppress the gang of twelve ignoble channels of the mind along with their captain Ego has also to be carried on. Ascent on the ladder of spiritual perfection depends on both. This uphill task is a never-ending exercise. One who has gone a long way in this journey is usually called a *dharmAtmA*.

6. Six Monumental Witnesses

Religious minded devotees usually quote the various scriptures as proof of their conviction that God takes care of His devotees. The sceptics on the other side have a hard time believing such naïve statements. This dichotomy of opinion has been there ever since Man started questioning the Faith of his fellowmen in the supernatural. Kuresa, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramanujacharya has written a short poem of seven verses called *'Arta-trANa-parAyaNa-stotram'*. The hymn praises the Lord by saying He is the only Refuge and this is testified for all time by Six Monumental Witnesses. These are Prahlada, Vibhishana, Gajendra, Draupadi, ahalya and Dhruva. But before we mention these six instances cited by Kuresa we need to recall the dimensional context of time-duration in which he is giving us this proof. The six instances identified by Kuresa is over such a long period of mythological history, namely over a period of, roughly, 1.9 billion years, which is the time elapsed since this *kalpa* started.

The first instance is that of Dhruva which occurred in the early part of the first *manvantara*, i.e., the first 30 and odd crores (A crore is ten million) of years since the beginning of this *kalpa*. It was at the end of that *manvantara* that Prahlada, lived and it is his story that forms the core of the second instance mentioned by Kuresa. The story of Gajendra which is the third instance in the chronological order is said to have happened in the fourth *manvantara*. The story of Vibhishana and Ahalya occurred in Rama's time i.e., in the 24^{th} *mahA-yuga* of the current *manvantara*. The story of Panchali is just 5100 and odd years old. Thus the six instances which are cited as colossal witnesses for the Supreme Presence of the Lord actually span an unimaginably l…o…n…g period of time. That is one of the reasons why we call them 'monumental'.

The first story is that of the boy Dhruva who looked for God and found Him. It is a story depicting the **apex of the Lord's benefaction**. Dhruva was five years old when this happened. His father was king Uttanapada, his mother was Suniti, but his father favoured his second wife, Suruchi. It was the latter who was sitting next to the throne when little Dhruva walked into the audience-hall one day. He saw his step-brother sitting on the lap of his father. He also wanted to do the same. But his step-mother Suruchi would not allow this. She almost burst out on him with the words: 'Go and be born as my son in your next birth. Until then you cannot hope to climb to the lap of your father.' The little boy went crying to his mother. But she, while lamenting the situation, raised her hands to the sky and said, 'The Lord is our only Saviour'. Dhruva decided to go to the forest, do a severe penance, find God and ask Him! The divine sage Narada appeared before him on the way. Finding how steadfast he was in his determination to look for God, Narada taught him how to contemplate on the divine form. Dhruva did as told by Narada and created an all-time record of a five-year old boy doing a severe penance (*tapas*) for five and a half months as nobody else had ever done before. The penance was so intense that it sent vibrations of energy all through the Universe. He had the Divine Form of the Lord embedded in his heart and was immersed in the blissful vision inside himself. So when the Lord really appeared he would not open his eyes. The Lord had to take off the inside vision from Dhruva's mind. Only then did he open his eyes and see the Lord in His full four-armed form in all His dazzling brilliance and majesty. Not being able to say a word he just prostrated before the Lord. The Lord touched his cheek with the Divine Conch and then it was that a beautiful *stotra* (hymn of praise) flowed out of Dhruva's mouth. This stotra in 12 verses (called dhruva-stuti, occurring in the *SrImad-BhA.*) is one of the most beautiful pieces in all of Hindu scriptural literature. The Lord blessed him with a long life of royalty and granted him the centre position in the celestial firmament around which everything in the sky revolves. But even as a boy of five he had already become the lodestar in the firmament of *bhakti.* The **apex of benefaction** is in the fact that Dhruva was given the topmost position in the whole universe; in other words there is nothing above him in the material universe. Dhruva is our first Witness.

The story of Prahlada, also from the *BhA.*, must be well-known to all who have been exposed to the Hindu religion and culture. To those readers who are hearing about it for the first time, here is the story in brief: In order to put an end to the extreme cruelty which a very powerful and inhuman king, Hiranya-kazipu by name, was perpetrating on the entire world, the Lord manifested in this form. Actually the boy-son of this King was very devoted to Lord *Vishnu* but the King in his arrogance wanted himself to be recognised as the only God, *the* God, of this universe. After many horrendous but futile attempts to convince his son of his viewpoint, the King asked him to show this God *Vishnu* who seemed to be the protector of this boy. In extreme anger the father showed a pillar and asked: Is your God in this pillar? The son, Prahlada, with supreme confidence in the omnipresence of the Lord, answered, YES. And lo and behold, the Lord obliged this little boy by appearing in the form of a half-man-half-lion from that pillar. And this appearance proved to be the end of the demonaic King. This story is the monumental record of the efficacy of a full-fledged faith in the omnipresence of God and of the boy Prahlada as the model of such faith. Prahlada is our second Witness. The full story from BhA. is given later in this book.

The next is the story of the elephant king of yore who appealed to the Fountain of Godhead at his greatest crisis and got divine rescue. Once upon a time in the *tAmasa-manvantara* there was a King of elephants who was actually in his previous birth a human king by name *indradyumna*. He was cursed to become an elephant because of a mischief he played on a sage. The elephant *gajendra* (= elephant-king) was once caught hold of by the leg by a giant crocodile and could not free himself for years. Actually the struggle lasted for a thousand years. At the end the elephant got exhausted and appealed to the mercy of the Supreme Lord by raising a big cry: O Lord of the Universe, save me. At this great crisis it was the Lord *Vishnu* who answered the call. He sent His divine Disc (= *sudarSana cakra*) in advance as a pilot heralding the coming of the Lord. The Disc did its job even before the Lord appered on the scene. The crocodile itself was a *gandharva* (resident of the world of divines, whose specialty was arts and music) by name *huhu*, who was living the life of a crocodile because of another curse. Both the crocodile and the elephant were thus released from their curses. This story of the release of the elephant-king is known as '*gajendra-moksha*'. It occurs in VIII – 2,3,4 of *SrImad BhA.*. These chapters are considered by orthodox Hindus to be one of the most powerful for daily morning recitation for the purpose of obtaining *moksha* at the end of one's life . One of these verses is included as Verse No.8 in our selection in Speak to God. For the same reason it is also recited at the bed of a dying person. This story has an esoteric meaning which is unforgettable. In the language of mysticism, the soul in its distress must cry out to the Lord to come to its succour. One of the twelve AlvArs, Tirumangai-AlvAr brings out the nuance of the theory of *bhakti* very effectively when he sings in supplication that only one crocodile caught the leg of the elephant-king whereas five in the form of his senses are pulling him in the vortex of *saMsara*!

***Ahalya* was sage *Gautama*'s wife**. She is considered as one of the leading stars in the firmament of chaste wormen in mythological history. The lord of the divines, *indra*, is known to have had many forays with out-of-the-law adventures, which involved even a licence for immorality. One such was his visit to the hermitage of Gautama on an early morning after he had tricked Gautama into believing that it was time for him to go to his morning river bath. When *ahalyA* was thus alone *indra* took the form of gautama, entered the hermitage and assaulted her modesty. The sage did not take much time to sense this, because on his quick return he saw *indra* going out of the hermitage and ahalyA was transparently repentful. While *indra* was given a punishment by the sage in the form of a curse, another curse was also thrown at ahalya by the sage, the curse being that she would become immobile as a stone for a long long period. The redemption from this curse was to be in the time of the descent of the Lord as *Rama*. Several thousands of years later, it was Lord Sri *Rama* therefore, who woke her up from her inert state, by a mere touch of his foot. The mere touch of the divine foot was enough to absolve her of all sins, if there were any, after all that punishment of immobility for such a long time.

The supreme example of the Lord being the sole refuge in the most trying of circumstances is also the story of the supreme example of the surrender of the ego in Hindu mythological history. This is the story of *vibhISaNa*, the youngest brother of *RAvaNa*. The story occurs in the Ramayana, which should be studied, for the esoteric implications of the story, if for nothing else. Vibhishana never liked his elder brother's

audacity in abducting Sita from Rama's hermitage during the latter's absence. The absence itself was engineered by Ravana. Vibhishana showered counsel upon counsel on Ravana both in private and in public. The latter would not listen but went to the extent of insulting his well-meaning brother. Finally Vibhishana decided to abandon his misbehaving brother and seek refuge at the feet of Lord Sri Rama. This surrender of Vibhishana to Lord Sri Rama is called the episode of Vibhishana *SarNAgati*. A hundred percent faith in the Lord is what is required. It is a conviction that 'He will protect me under all circumstances'. This trust and confidence in the Lord is the one sure foundation on which the principle of surrender works. The trust in God should be a trust with total abandon. This is the abandon which forms the concluding part of the Lord's advice in the *Gita*. It is the abandonment of all dependence on anything other than the Lord.

Infinite compassion is shown by the Lord in the story of Draupadi also known as *PanchAli*, the daughter of the *PanchAla* king.. The scene - this is the central traumatic scene in the long drama of the *mahAbhArata* epic - is the large assemblage of kings and princes in the Palace hall of Dhritarashtra, the Kaurava emperor where the Pandava prince has just gambled away everything he posessed - including himself, his four brothers and their devoted consort, the Princess Draupadi. The helpless princess is forcibly dragged to the hall and outraged by an attempt to strip off her sari. Draupadi cries in horror and despair. O Lord of Dwaraka, where are you? None but you can save me now. I surrender to you. The entire assemblage shamelessly watch without raising a finger. But lo! And behold, the sari starts lengthening and though it is pulled off most viciously, Draupadi remains covered. The other end of the sari never appears. It simply goes on and on. By the Infinite Grace of the Lord the sari has become as it were, infinite in length!

These are the six stories, spread over the past cosmic time in this day of *BrahmA*, which are cited in the classic verse of Kuresa, given below.

> ***vAtsalyad-abhaya-pradAna-samayAd-ArtArti-nirvApaNAt***
> ***audAryAd-agha-SoshaNAd-aghaNita-SreyaH-padaH-prApaNat/***
> ***sevyaH SrIpatir-eka-eva jagatAm ete ca shaT sAkshiNaH***
> ***prahlAdaSca vibhIshaNaSca karirAT pAncAly-ahalyA dhruvaH //***
>
> Meaning: In the entire universe, it is Sri hari (*Vishnu*) that is to be worshipped as the Ultimate Resort. Six colossal figures stand testimony to this: Prahlada, Vibhishana, Gajendra the elephant-king, Panchali, Ahalya and Dhruva. They are the blessed ones who have received , respectively, superlative affection, supreme refuge, undisputable protection, infinite compassion, total absolution and apex of benefaction, from the Lord.

7. The Dance Divine

The scene was TILLAI – a forest of tillai (= *Excoecaria Agallocha*) shrubs – the place where Chidambaram is situated in Tamilnadu today. Vyagrapada was the learned son of a great ascetic. He came to Tillai to perform penance. There he saw a *Shiva*-linga under a banyan tree near a sacred tank. He consecrated another *Shiva*-linga near another tank, west of the original, and worshipped both the images. The flowers he plucked for worship were spoiled by honey bees since he had to gather them after dawn. He prayed to the

Lord to provide him with the eyes, claws and feet of a tiger so that he may collect flawless flowers for worship. His request was granted. Hence his name was VyAgrapAda (vYAgra = tiger, pAda = feet) One day in yogic trance he had a vision of the Lord's dance in a forest. He yearned to see it himself and awaited the day.

Lord *Vishnu* reclining on Adisesha (the serpent-seat of God) was one day in an uncommon mood which both Lakshmi and Adisesha noticed. Asked about it, the Lord narrated a long story. The previous night he accompanied Lord *Shiva* to the Daruka forest to test the piety of the Rishis there. The two Lords, *Shiva* and *Vishnu*, assumed the disguise of a naked beggar, begging for food (*BhikshATana-mUrti*) and of a beautiful voluptuous woman (Mohini). The Rishi wives and the Rishis lost their senses on seeing this (divine) pair and went after them. When the Rishis discovered who the intruder was who disturbed the balance of their wives, they set up in anger an unholy sacrifice out of which they pulled, one after the other, a tiger, a ball of fire, a serpent and a monster and hurled these at *Shiva*. The latter peeled off the skin of the tiger and wore it round his waist. He caught hold of the ball of fire in his left hand and held it aloft. He calmed the serpent and wore it round his neck as an ornament. By this time he had begun to dance in joy. So when they set up the monster against him, he dwarfed the monster, stood on it on one leg and continued his dance. *Vishnu* and the others were charmed by this Ananda-tANDava of the Lord. The Rishis were blessed and the two Lords of the Trinity disappeared.

Hearing the rapturous narrationof this by Lord *Vishnu*, Adisesha wanted to be blessed to see this dance of the Lord.He was accordingly asked to do a penance. He did. At the end of it he was born as the son of Anasuya on Earth. One tradition says he fell from heaven into the folded hands of Anasuya when she prayed for a son . So he was called Patanjali (Pat = fall; anjali = folded hands). The other tradition says Adisesha emerged from Anasuya's hand as a serpent. The frightened Anasuya dropped the hooded serpent and so he was Patanjali (= one who had been dropped from the palm) . In this form he went to to Tillai, joined Vyagrapada and told him his desire to see the Lord's dance. The 'tiger-sage' was delighted to see this 'serpent-sage' with the same purpose s himself. Patanjali also established another hermitage and another *Shiva*-linga and worshipped both his linga and the original linga of Tillai.

Several years passed in this manner. Then on a Thursday with the Sun in Capricornus and Moon in Pushya (Thai-ppusam day) the Lord manifested Himself and danced before them in the presence of Parvati. The two sages relished it to their heart's content and prayed that the Lordshould stay permanently at Tillai so that all of humanitymay see this Ananda-tANDava and be blessed. And so He stands there even today as Nataraja, the King of Dancers, along with His consort.

The Cosmic Rhythm and the Symbolism of the TANDava.

The Dance Divine represented in the form of Nataraja is symbolic of the dynamic aspect of the ultimate Reality. The art of dancing by the finite human is a meagre attempt to express the mystery of the Cosmic Rhythm in the movements of the physical body. But

the divine dance is a supreme reflection and creative expression of the rhythm which underlies the whole universe and thus becomes a unique contribution of Indian thought to the world's culture. It has an applied symbolism of the five-fold gamut of divine activities *sRshTi* (Creation, Evolution), *sthiti* (Preservation, Sustenance), *samhAra* (Destruction, Dissolution), *tirodhAna* (Concealment, Illusion, indicating Bondage) and *anugraha* (Grace, indicating Release or Moksha).

The rear right arm which carries the Damaru (=drum) is indicative of Creation. It represents through its vibration the alternation of Consciousness between the manifest (universe) and the unmanifest (absolute). From the Damaruka evolved the seven notes of music as well as the eleven *Mahesvara sUtras* (which is the foundation of all grammar of language). These are the concluding strokes *Shiva* made on his drum as he stopped dancing, stopped whirling round and round.

The front right hand with palm raised is a gesture of protection to those in the whirl of life. It is called the *abhaya-hasta*.

The rear left hand which holds the pot of fire is indicative of *samhAra* or Destruction.

The front left hand extends across the chest, in a majestic sweep, its fingers pointing graciously and beautifully to the tip of the left leg, which is raised in a dancing posture. This leg is called *kunchita-pAda* (*kunchita* = raised, lifted or bent). The posture of this hand is called *gaja-hasta*, meaning it is like an elephant's trunk. The hand points to the uplifted foot, which grants the ultimate release, namely Moksha. In this sense this hand is also the *varada-hasta* (the boon-granting hand). That the fingers of this hand point exactly to the tip of the left leg is demonstrated twice every year when the Abhisheka is performed for the icon in the 1000-pillared hall. Then one can see that the milk poured on the left hand drops down exactly at the tip of the raised foot.

The right foot that presses on that presses on the wriggling *apasmAraka-purusha* (the Evil personified and dwarfed by the Lord) – called *muyalakan* in Tamil scriptures – represents the fifth function of the Lord, namely Concealment. The Lord dances on the remains of ego and ignorance so that the worshipper is free of the concealed evil of these two. The monster *muyalakan* is also conceived as *mahA-mAyA* which is the cause for all birth and death. It is also the cause for the three states of consciousness, namely, waking, dreaming and sleeping.

The raised left foot indicates the fourth state beyond these three and that is why it is indicated by His own left index finger of the right hand as the only refuge.

The ecstatic and vibrant nature of the dance, with the Lord whirling round on the one right leg is indicated by the matted hair (*jaTa*) flying on both sides of the head in waves one above the other and by a piece of cloth, partly around the waist and partly thrown over the left shoulder also flying in the air.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy writes, in his 'Dance of Shiva': 'What a grand conception! How amazing is the range of thought of the rishi-artists who brought forth the image of this reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature, universal in appeal to the philosopher, the lover, the artist of all ages and of all countries! Here is perpetual movement, perpetually poised – the rhythm of the spirit. There cannot be a more exact or more wise creation of the image of that Energy which Science must postulate behind all phenomena. If we would reconcile Time with Eternity, we can scarcely do so otherwise than by the conception of the alternations implied by the drum and by the fire in the night of Brahma. Nature is inert and cannot dance till Shiva wills it. He rises from his rapture, and, dancing, sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo! Matter also dances appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fulness of Time, still dancing, He destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest. This is poetry, but none the less, science'!

The Five SabhAs

There are five *SabhA*s, Halls of God's Assembly, in the temple of Chidambaram. The innermost, is the *Chit-sabhA*, the Hall of Knowledge. This is where the famous Nataraja icon is installed, and has been consecrated ever since known historical times and worshipped for ages. This Lord is the Lord of all assemblies and so He is known as *SabhA-pati*. He is the *Chit*, the very Consciousness of all living beings. The *Chit-SabhA* is located in the temple in the position of the heart in the human body, the man lying with his head to the south. Like the heart in the human body, the *sanctum sanctorum* (which is the Nataraja icon) is situated nor right in the middle but slightly shifted to one side. The temple itself is longer from north to south unlike the generality of temples which measure longer from east to west. The entrance to the *Chit-SabhA* is from *Kanaka*- (golden) *SabhA*. Both the *Kanaka SabhA* and the *Chit SabhA* have gilded roofs. These two *SabhA*s constitute the Holy of Holies. The third *SabhA* called the *Nritta SabhA* (Hall of Dance) is further south in the second *prAkAra* (= wide corridor with walls of enclosure) . It is a massive stone structure in the form of a chariot drawn by horses. It houses an image of the Lord in the dance-pose called *Urdhva-tANDava* (with one foot up in the air). The third *prAkAra* houses the hundred-pillared hall called the *Deva-SabhA* as well as the Raja *SabhA*, the 1000-pillared hall. It was in this hall that the writing, inauguration and first exposition of Periapuranam (See Chapter 9) by Sekkizhar took place in the twelfth century.

Evolution of the Chidambaram Temple Complex

The temple at Chidambaram proclaims to the whole world the mythological event of the Cosmic Dance. But it also is a record of history that grew around the concept . Along with the concept, physical monuments rose and what stands before us is a blend of mythology, concept and history. It is in fact also a symbiotic mixture of religion, science and art.The first temple to have been built must have been the *MUla-sthAnam* temple around the original *Shiva*-linga which Patanjali and Vyagrapada worshipped. Who actually made the Nataraja icon nobody knows. Traditional opinion believews it was made by the divine architect, Visvakarma. Historical and literary evidence leads us to

believe that it must have been there well before the 6th century C.E. The period of the Imperial Cholas (850-1290 C.E.) saw the phenomenal growth of the temple complex. The roof of the sanctum was gilded. Three walls of enclosures, at least one seven-storeyed gopuram in full, 100-pillared, and 1000-pillared halls, all were built. In this period the shrine of Nataraja became the main shrine. During the period 1216-1380 C.E., when the Pandyas patronised the temple, it grew further. But due to Malik-Kafur's invasion of the region, the daily rituals in the temple were disrupted in 1301-1311. The 14th to 17th century was the heyday of the Vijaynagar patronage. The gilding of th *Chit-SabhA* that we see today is not perhaps what the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas had gifted but the contribution of Virupaksha of Vijaynagar in 1383-1388 C.E. augmented at the end of the 17th century by Sambhaji. The years 1649 to 1686 was again a dark patch in the history of the temple. The icon itself was shifted to a secret place hundreds of miles away. Again from 1753 to 1781 there was interruption in the worship, services and festivals, due to the military occupation by the French and Maratha contingent during the Carnatic and Mysore Wars. The icons were moved to the *SabhApati* Mantapam in Tiruvarur. In the 19th and 20th centuries Renovations and Maha-kumbhabhishekams either in full or in part are known to have been performed in the years 1803, 1858, 1891, 1922, 1951, 1955, 1972, 1979 and 1987.

Miraculous recovery of the Tevaaram Hymns

The great temple builder King Raja-Raja I (985 – 1014 C.E.) had also a desire to unearth the Tevaaram hymns believed to be lost or hidden somewhere except the few that professional singers in some temples remembered. Once he heard about Nambi-Andar-Nambi, a little boy of Tirunaraiyur (near Chidambaram), whose devotion was considered so great, it was said that the *VinAyaka* of the place yielded to his request to eat a dish of rice offered by him. The King located this boy and asked him about the whereabouts of the lost hymns of the Saiva Samayacharyas. Back came the reply that the hymns lay in a locked room in the western *prAkAra* of the Chidambaram temple under the seals of the hymnists themselves. The King used his authority as well as some imagination to recover the hymns at the place indicated but the whole thing was a heap of palmyra leaves under a mound of ants! At that time there was heard an aereal voice declaring that whatever was recoverable should be enough for this age.

What was recovered was probably

384 out of a supposed 10000 hymns of Sambandar, 312 out of 49000 of Appar, 100 out of 37000 hymns of Sundarar.

This is how the now well-known Tevaaram hymns were discovered. Raja-Raja I had thus made the greatest contribution to the growth of Tamil literature. From that time onwards these hymns are being sung in all *Shiva* temples of Tamil origin by professionals trained for this purpose under benefactions made by successive generations of kings and philanthropists.

The story of Nandanar

Nandanar was a great Harijan devotee of the Lord of Chidambaram. The rigid caste-ridden norms of those times precluded him from entering temples though he longed to do so. The Lord performed a miracle for him at Tiruppungur where the Nandi image which was obstructing his view from beyond the gate of the temple was asked to move aside by the Lord and it did so! Even today we can see the Nandi away from its usual central position. Nandanar kept talking about going to Chidambaram and having darshan of Lord Nataraja to whom he had a consuming passion. When he finally arrived there the Dikshidars would not allow him to go inside the temple. The Lord *SabhA-pati* himself appeared in their dreams and commanded them to allow him. Next day Nandanar had the bath in the holy tank and was taken in a procession to the sanctorum. But once he entered it he disappeared into space and attained beatitude. Nandanar has been included as one of the 63 Nayanmars (See Chapter 9) who are worshipped in all *Shiva* temples as the most blessed devotees of the Lord.

Gopalakrishna Bharathi was a famous composer of Carnatic music of the 19th century. To his credit are several songs on Nataraja. The one beginning with "Is there any other Lord equal to *SabhApati*?" is probably the most often sung piece. He has immortalised Nandanar's stoy by an imaginative rendering of it as an opera called 'Nandanar Charitram'. Several celebrated songs from this work are very popular wherever Tamil is spoken or understood; they have had a profound appeal even on those who were the last defenders of the caste system.

8. A Dialogue on Free Will vs. Divine Will

The following is an imaginary no-holds-barred 'dialogue' among
'DFW', standing for 'Disciple who holds Free Will is everything',
'DDW', standing for 'Disciple who holds Divine Will is everything' and
'TD', standing for a 'Third Disciple who holds that it is neither this nor that exclusively'.

But as the conversation proceeds, one will find their original convictions gradually change.

DFW: Free will is essential for reward and punishment; otherwise anyone would do anything they wish and say "it was God's will, don't blame me!".

DDW: Ah, but that is not quite a correct viewpoint because,you are cheating. God's will has been expressed in the various Shrutis, *Gita*, Upanishads, Bible and what have you, and if you follow those actions, you can claim to be doing God's will, otherwise you cannot claim to act in God's way.

DFW: Hold on, even my acting contrary to the scriptures is being done by God, right? So I don't understand you distinguishing some actions from others.

DDW: True, but even the consequences of the actions against Him will have been described in the scriptures. They are available for all to see.

TD: I think you are both taking extreme positions. If man did not have free will to attempt to do his will, Veda statements like '*satyam vada*' (Speak the truth) and '*Dharmam cara*' (Act according to *Dharma*) would lose all their meaning. So I am not prepared to agree with DDW. But what DDW says that it is finally Divine will that expresses itself is correct.

DDW. Then how can you also agree with DFW?

TD: That is the tricky point. Without the implied choice of action implied in statements like *satyam vada* and *Dharmam cara* we can go nowhere. Man is free to act in the way his tendencies (*VasanAs*) take him. Man is also free to resist the bad *vAsanAs* and act in a way which will purify his mind and rid it of the dirt accumulated therein.

DDW: Then why are the scriptures repeatedly professing that it is all divine will? "*mayaivaite nihatAH pUrvameva* .." ('All these people have been killed by me already ...') says Krishna in the eleventh chapter of his *Gita*.

DFW. That quote is exactly what confuses me.

TD: Maybe Krishna is talking to an enlightened person!

DFW: But Arjuna was not enlightened – at least, at that point. But wait. What do you say to such expressions in our shAstras: "Neither Hari (*Vishnu*) nor Hara (Shiva) can erase what is written on your forehead"? Does it not say that the so-called fate that overrules you is dominant. And is not Fate the same as Divine Will?

DDW: Are you, DFW, arguing for me now?

TD: Both of you are confusing me now! Let us go about it systematically. That Fate you are talking about is the *prArabdha-karma*. It is the portion of our past *karma* which has started taking effect in this birth of ours and it is this facet of our life where neither God nor anybody can intervene.

DDW: But that would limit the Almighty's all-mightiness!

TD: Here I am with you. To limit His own all-mightiness is His own Will!.

DDW: Let us come back now to Free Will and Divine Will. If *prArabdha* is so dominant again you come only to my view. Nothing can change God's Will!

DFW: But we have still to answer the question about the choice of action that TD raised.

TD. That is why I said we have to proceed systematically. The choice of action is there so long as you believe 'I am the doer'. Krishna says "Only the man overpowered by his ego thinks he is the doer" (B.G. 3rd chapter).

DFW: You have now brought in a third belief – namely whether one is the doer or not. But if I am not the doer and God is the doer, then is He not responsible for all my bad thoughts and bad actions?

TD: He is not responsible even for your good thoughts and good actions.

DDW: Wait, wait. You are contradicting my theory of Divine Will totally and I thought you earlier said that you agreed with me.

TD: There are stages of evolution in a man's life – in fact, several lives. There is a stage when we have to grant free will. That is the stage when you are either a growing child either in the physical plane or in the spiritual plane. You cannot tell a high school student that it is all divine will; then there is no purpose in asking him to make effort at his education.

DFW: But even assuming that at the adult stage of a better spiritual evolution, to believe it is some other Power within us, other than our egoism, that it is the doer and the experiencer, is only fatalism. I would not like to grant that Hinduism or Vedanta is all fatalism.

TD: Your equating the fact that there is another Power within us with Fatalsim is not correct. The recognition of this other Power within us is the first step towards our spiritual evolution.

DDW: What can this other Power within us be except God?

DFW: But that contradicts your earlier statement that God is not responsible for any of our actions either good or bad!

TD: This other Power within us is not God. It is our own individualised *PrakRti* (*SvabhAva* – our own nature) for which we are ourselves the ar*chit*ect, by means of the way we thought and lived in all our past lives and also in this life up to the present.

DDW: But I have never heard of this concept of 'individualised *prakRti'* that you are using.

TD: In *Gita* Ch.3, *shloka* No.33 the Lord says that even the wise man does work according to his *prakRti*. Acharya Shankara, in commenting on this, writes: '*PrakRti* is nothing but the accumulated *samskAra*s of our past lives individualised and earmarked for this life of ours'. The sanskrit word '*prakRta*' (from which '*prakRti*' is derived) means 'currently in vogue'.

DDW: But why is God causing people to behave the way they do in these times? How can you account for the fact that the world is in such a mess? Why is everyone now immersed in thinking only of themselves and not the greater good? Why is this play?

DFW: You said it right. It all looks like a deliberate play. In fact, I would say that if the theory of play is right, then God must be a sadist!

TD: No, no. Not that way. It is a play alright, but that is what is termed in the Puranas as God's LeelA. That requires a lot of faith to go in that direction. Let us

pursue the trend of our conversation in the way we started it. First God is not causing people to behave the way they do. It is the people who behave that way. That itself tells you that people have the freewill to do what they want to do. This free will God has granted man.

DFW: At last you are veering to my viewpoint!

TD: Don't be too assured. Of course God has granted freewill to us both to obey His orders like 'satyam vada' and 'Dharmam cara' and also to disobey them.

DDW: That is what I call the play of the Divine.

DFW: But then God must be foolish to play that dangerous game.

DDW: Your choice of words 'dangerous game' reminds me of what Sathya Sai Baba once replied to a devotee. The devotee asked him, while they were walking along the shores of the Arabian Sea, 'Lord, if you are capable of doing all those miracles for which you are known, why don't you change this entire sea into a sea of petrol and thus solve the problem of scarcity of oil-fuel in the world?'. Sathya Sai Baba immediately replied: 'But then I cannot guarantee that no crazy human being like you would not throw a lighted cigarette into that sea!'.

TD: The moral of the story is: Even God cannot guarantee that man will not behave in an animal way. And that proves that Man has free will!

DFW: Oh Good! Daniel come to judgement!

DDW: But then where does all this lead us?

TD: It leads to our starting point. It is not all black and white. It is a spectrum of colours. The answer to the dilemma depends upon three factors. 1. The situation or the action that we are talking about. 2. Level of spiritual evolution of the individual concerned. 3. Degree of willingness to stand apart and surrender the ego.

DDW. I am sure on the third factor the generality of us may be taken to be at the base level.

TD. To simplify the discussion I am willing to assume, for the present, that with respect to the second factor – spiritual evolution also – we are almost at the base level. Once we do that, we come back to the child level of spiritual evolution, which we have already discussed. At this level, it is Free will that is considered to be dominant in the psychology of the individual concerned. But this is only the beginning. But when we start moving up the ladder of spiritual evolution, our factor levels get a gradual relaxation.

DFW. I think this is too much for me today. Why not we continue tomorrow?

DDW and TD: OK.

DFW: Do you mean then that what is dominant is different at different times of the life of an individual?

DDW: If I heard TD right, I thought he said: *in the psychology of the person concerned*

TD: Yes, when we start moving up the spiritual ladder our mental make-up changes.

DDW: Yes, we gradually begin to understand how when a *jnAni* is acting, actually he is not doing any action because he has no identification with his body, mind and intellect. But such understanding also generates new confusions in one's mind. The *Gita* verse which specifically refers to this 'inaction in action' also in the same breath refers to 'action in inaction'. While not acting how can one do action?

DFW: When the train moves, the landscape moves in the opposite direction. The child thinks that it is the landscape that is moving and the train is stationary. Even we adults get this mistaken feeling when two trains are in adjacent platforms ready to move in opposite directions. Suddenly we feel that the other train has already moved, but on examination of the changing landscape between the two trains we understand that it is our train that has started moving and not the other train. This is the understanding of action in apparent inaction. To attribute non-action to the Self which stands still as it were is only to comprehend it relatively. It is the Self which permeates everyhere, it is the substratum of everything and it is the prime mover par excellence. The Self is therefore the chief agent of action, as it were, though it appears to be only a silent witness. Thus the wise man sees action in non-action.

DDW: Hey, DFW, Are you not advocating my cause that it is all God's will that is taking place?

DFW: Well, TD has said just now that our moods change. Maybe my mood has changed! But shall we get back to the earlier trend of the conversation? TD, you said that as we move up the ladder of spiritual perfection, our factor levels change. Can you continue that thought a little further?

TD: As we move up the ladder of spiritual understanding, for some of us the first shock arises when we begin to realise that, in addition to the limitations of parentage, sex and environment, there are other limitations also. Very often we blame it on our ill-luck if, after all our efforts, we don't achieve what we want to achieve. Slowly it dawns on us that what and how we will, there is something else that wills it otherwise. If we can find a scapegoat of an earthly person or cause we blame it on them. But when we don't find such a cause, we are at a dead end for explanations. And then it is that the concept of *prArabdha karma* seems to make sense. And we realise that *prArabdha* could also be another name for ill-luck. Why ill luck? Even for good luck also, on which we put so much faith, *prArabdha* could be the other name!

DFW: But when we reach, as you say, a stage where we look upward for the hand of God to help us out of our problems, do we really believe that God can change things for us?

DDW: What else does it mean to look upward for the hand of God?

TD: I think DFW is asking *Shall we trust God totally? Or shall we take it that He gives just a hand?*

DDW: That is a dilemma that I have never got through.

TD: I think almost all of us go through this dilemma most of our lives vacillating between extremes. The intensity of this vacillation depends on our mood and environment. It is also a function of the company we keep and the amount of pressure from our peers.

DDW: Oh yes. It also depends on what somebody just said to me and walked away. You allow this DFW to be talking to you continuously, your mood will change.

DFW: Hey, DDW, it is the same thing with me when you keep reeling off your quotes from authoirities and scriptures!

TD: Well, it is nobody's fault. It is in our nature. The company we keep, our kith and kin as well as the attachment we have to all of them influence largely the opinions we have and only magnifies the dilemma about whether to believe in God totally or not.

DFW: In fact, I have a fundamental question in that connection. If you believe in a supernatural interventionist God who comes to your help when you pray to Him, how do you explain the umpteen situations when He does not intervene?

DDW: Oh Boy! That is a deep question. May be we should sit back and think about it.

TD: We had just raised the question why the supernatural interventionist God does not always intervene – even in such tragedies like the Tsunami.

DFW. You said it right. Why did He not intervene and stop the tragedy? If He exists but cannot remove our suffering then He is not God. If He exists and would not remove our suffering then He is not kind. If He exists and should not remove our suffering then He is not the boss. If He exists and suffering also has to exist then He is not the only Truth.

DDW. You seem to have analysed it thoroughly!

TD: All these are only rhetorical statements which do not take into account the fact that a God, if He is really God, should not be judged from our human norms of right and wrong, justice and injustice.

DFW. You are only inventing an answer so that you can escape answering the question.

DDW. I feel that these questions themselves have been invented to throw God out.

TD: My answer has a simple reason. No human being has either the database or the holistic view that Divinity must surely have of the universe and its contents.

DFW: I don't understand you.

DDW: TD says God has an ultimate purpose for everything and we may not know it.

TD: But His purpose could not be removal of human poverty or illness.

DDW: Why not?

DFW: Because if that were so , He should have done it long ago. He did not have to wait for two or three millenia to remove illness and poverty from the world. At least it is clear He has not done it yet.

TD: I think we are going at a tangent. We wanted to understand why it is that we cannot understand that He is not removing our suffering even though by definition of God as Almighty God, He should have been able to do it. And DDW said that God perhaps has a purpose for everything. Shall I tell you a real story why I feel DDW might be right?

DDW and DFW together: Go ahead.

TD. Well it is a long story. But let me be as brief as possible. Two American youngsters living 100 miles south of New York plan to spend a Saturday afternoon in a public park near New York along with some of their friends (living north of New York) who promise to join them at a certain specified time right at the entrance to the park.

The plan is made, almost to the minute. But the two, on their way to New York meet, first with a tire burst, then halfway up with a hold-up by no less than the sheriff of the area for speeding – both these incidents taking off two hours from their schedule. And then, after the hold-up, when they start the car, the engine refuses to ignite and this causes a further delay of another two hours because the cause is traced to be battery failure. But since they are only 25 miles from the park they decide to give it a try even after the delay, even though they are sure their friends would have given them up by this time. But soon after, they have to negotiate a long diversion of the route in view of a nasty accident on the highway ahead of them; and this diversion delays them as much as another hour, because they lose their way! Thus there have been five coincidences all working against them and when they finally reach the park it is late evening and in fact the park is closing its gates. Still they enter and look for their friends. The park is deserted since everybody has gone. They are about to curse their fate and return to their car when they hear cries for help from a lake in the park. Rushing there they see two boys almost drowning. They jump in and being first-aid-certificate holders themselves they are able to save the two little boys of ten and twelve from certain drowning and death. They think of the sequence of events that happened to them during the whole trip. A few minutes earlier they had thought that their journey was nothing but futile, their day had been spent in vain, but now it became clear that it was not so; because if they had not arrived at this late hour near that lake, those two boys would have died by drowning! This is a true story. The Almighty has a purpose for everything!

DFW: That is interesting certainly. But we have strayed far from our original quest of deciding between Free will and Divine Will.

DDW: But we have to settle this question of God's non-intervention. When there is a natural calamity like the Tsunami, we have only to take it that God does not want, by His own Free Will, to interfere with Nature and its workings – though all of it is His own creation.

DFW: Wait a minute. You just said that God has Free Will. Free Will implies multiple options and a freedom to exercise choice. Does He have several options? Why does He choose one of them?

DDW : Because He has a purpose for everything as I already told you.

DFW: Purpose is always for achieving something. Does God want to achieve something? But I have heard it said that God has nothing to obtain which He has not already obtained.

TD: His purpose could only be to bring back every erring human being to His fold.

DDW: But then you are implicitly agreeing to the contention that human beings have the freedom of will to err.

TD. Certainly, that is what I have been saying from the beginning. God gives you the commandment of '*satyam vada*' and '*Dharmam chara*' and also gives you the free will to disobey them. But He also keeps on telling you to have the willingness to obey them.

DDW: Is not even this Free Will subject to the influence of the Divine?

TD: You have touched a deeper chord. Let us take it next time.

DDW: We were raising the doubt whether the Free Will that is enjoined to obey God's injunctions through the vedas, is itself under the influence of the Divine Will.

DFW: I was thinking of this problem last night and I have a fundamental doubt before you all proceed further in this discussion. The philosophy of advaita that we all adhere to claims that there is only one absolute *Brahman* and everything else is only an appearance that comes and goes. If that is so, where is the question of a divine will? Does *Brahman*, the attributeless, have a will for Itself?

DDW: Hey! Where do you get all these questions? They cut the ground under my feet!

TD: But it is a legitimate question. I suggest we take it up first.

DFW: I feel if you grant that the attributeless *Brahman* is the only Absolute Truth, then there can be no divine will. If you want to have divine will as an entity, then advaita is contradicted.

DDW. But if you grant free will absolutely, then that means there are choices to choose from. All this means duality and multiplicity, which is against advaita.

TD: May I correct your qualification 'absolutely'? Even if there is one instance of free will, that is enough to imply duality.

DFW: If there is only one Consciousness everywhere and all the time, where is the question of free will? Free will of whom? Free from what?

TD: The problem arises because we are making the standard mistake of mixing up two different levels of our awareness. If we want to stay at the level of the Absolute *Brahman*, then there is nothing else to talk about. Only Silence. Remember Dakshinamurti concept. But the moment we think of God or *ISvara*, we have descended to the level of the *mAyic* world and in this *vyAvahArika* world, there is God, -- who is now nothing but Saguna *Brahman*, i.e., *Brahman* on whom we have superposed several attributes -- there are creations, there can be talk of free will, divine will etc.

DDW: I see. It is really a subtle point.

TD. This subtlety is usually missed in arguments. Now let us come back to the question of whether free will itself is under the influence of the divine will.

DFW: In fact that is exactly where I have another question. I would like here to come down to the ordinary concept of *bhakti* or devotion rather than the abstract injunctions of '*satyam vada*' and '*Dharmam chara*'. Now all religion says "Be devoted to God. Pray to Him". This is *bhakti*. If God, your saguna *Brahman*, is the Almighty that He is supposed to be, why not He Himself grant me, by a wave of His magic, that *bhakti* which I find it difficult to cultivate by my free will?

DDW: Good question! I appreciate you, DFW, for the way you articulate your questions. But God does grant you that *bhakti*. Only you have to receive it. The rain may pour, but if a vessel is upside down no water will collect in it.

TD: Well said. Our minds are free. So by our own free will we have to decide to receive what God gives us. By our own volition we must decide to trust in God and surrender to Him.

DDW: If by supplanting our will, God has to give us what we need, then there need be no creation, no existence of the universe.

TD: That is the mystery of God's *leelA*, sport or play of creation. Creation is where God allows beings to have the feeling of separateness from Him and then waits and waits until the beings that have emerged from Him come back to Him. If they don't want to come back to Him, He allows them to go their own way and take their own time to discover that that is the Want which will rid them of all other wants.

DDW: This is what Sathya Sai Baba calls 'The agony of God' in this great cycle of creation. His anguish is that beings do not want to get out of this cycle. So sometimes He gives them all the petty things they want, so that in due time they would want what He wants to give them.

TD: As Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Breeze of Grace is always blowing, but you have to set your sail to catch that breeze'. In other words He allows us to go our ways and learn by our own experience and come to Him by our own volition.

DFW: Then is this experience ours or is it given by Him?

TD: He does not give us these experiences. Because, we have already programmed it for ourselves by our own past actions.

DDW: The one thing He assures us however, is that once we take even a minor step towards Him He comes forth with both hands to receive us, as would a mother in welcoming a lost child. As Sathya Sai Baba would say: 'You take one step towards Me; I will take ten steps towards you'!

DFW: Then let us come back to the question of whether Free Will itself is under the influence of Divine Will or not.

TD: I am happy you are recognising the existence of Divine Will to that extent. When we say that everything happens according to the Will of God, are we specifically referring to Nature and Nature's doings?

DFW: When an event happens to a human being and this is referred to as God's Will, is this not just another way of saying that it is one's past *karma* that has brought about this event?

DDW: But the average psychology is different. When a bad thing happens to somebody we rush to say it is God's Will. When a good thing happens to us we would rather ascribe it to our own effort.

TD: That is where the teaching of religion is important. Either learn to accept both as God's Will, or in the alternative, learn to take responsibility for both. Don't blame only unpleasant things on God.

DFW. That is why I say, we should take responsibility for every one of our actions. It is all our free will.

DDW: You are going back to your old refrain.

TD: We shall now have to go to the next level of spiritual evolution. That, I think, will make matters clearer.

DDW: We were discussing the question of DFW whether Free will itself could be under the influence of Divine Will.

TD: Well, it is quite clear here from your own example. This discussion on Divine Will and Free Will is taking place because you raised a question first and started the discussion. You are therefore the '*nimitta kAraNa*' for this action that is taking place now. But this event of a discussion is itself God's Will.

DFW. If you go in this strain then every action of everybody becomes an act of God!

DDW. No. Each action of ours is not merely a product of the action or thought that precedes it but it is also the product of a state of moral character , which is what TD calls our individualised *prakRti*. This *prakRti* has been brought by us as a chip of imprints from all our previous lives.

DFW: So is it then not God's action?

DDW: But it is He who is the distributor of results of past deeds and thoughts.

TD: Wait. The concept of free will changes (subjectively) as one evolves philosophically. The common man's understanding that the Almighty intervenes either by way of Grace or otherwise is rather elementary. The real work of the Almighty is deeper. Not a leaf moves without His knowledge or sanction, not a drop flows down by itself. Gravity is His Will. Action and Reaction are His Will.

DFW: Is Divine Will absolute then? Is that what is called Fate? Then why all this talk about Free Will?

DDW: Let us not confuse between Fate and Divine Will. I think they are different.

TD: Yes, first let us dispose of Fate. Then we can discuss Free Will and Divine Will more understandably. Fate and Free will are interwoven just as the threads of a fabric are crossed and interlaced. We cannot rewrite our past or fly like a bird or breathe under water. These are our limitations, inherent in our nature, our fate. Our past is our fate for the future. But it is only our tendencies that are determined by our past (and the so-called fate). Our actions are not determined by our fate. Actions are ours.

DFW: Then why does DDW say that everything is Divine Will?

DDW: Just now we decided to dispose of the concept of Fate before we make the final lap of discussion between divine will and free will. Don't bring in divine will now. TD is doing alright; please allow him to go his own way.

TD: Only actions are ours. Fate has nothing to do it. Fate, that is, our *prArabdha*, might have created the circumstances that led to our action, but the action is ours. Fate might have contributed by shaping our tendencies, which led to our action, but the action is still ours. It is our mind that dictates our action. All spiritual teaching pleads for the Will of Man to become stronger than the mind. Everywhere in the upanishads the appeal is to the will . It is not as if man is a helpless creature as a leaf in the storm or a feather in the wind. Man's will has an element of complete freedom. It is the power which enables him to act in directions opposite even to his spontaneous bad tendency (*dur-vAsanA*). In this sense he is the architect of his fate. Indeed this is the time when he should not slacken any of his self-effort. Ultimately man's will must prove stronger than fate, because it is his own past will that created his present fate.

DFW: Wonderful. I have heard Swami ChinmayAnanda say something like this. I cannot take shelter under 'Fate' and refuse to act in a morally elevating manner. I cannot argue, for instance, that 'I will not go to the help of a suffering man, because it is his *karma* that makes him suffer; let him suffer!'. Maybe the other person suffers because of his *karma* but my action or *karma* of not going to his help is my own decision, out of my own free will.

DDW: And that will be a debit entry in your *kArmic* accounting, for which you have only yourself to blame.

TD: In fact this cover for inaction will start a chain reaction of *vAsanAs* in your future conduct and will gradually consume you in its own way. I was saying therefore, that it is by our own will that we must face our fate, that is *prArabdha*. Of course we cannot rewrite our past. We may not be able to repair our wrong actions, but we can learn lessons from them and act accordingly, by a determined free will, in the future.

DFW: Maybe we can try to avoid repeating them.

TD: Fate is only our *prArabdha karma* which nobody can escape. It seems even divine intervention cannot change it. Many of our *stotras* which promise eradication of all sin as the result of recitation of that *stotra*, are careful to imply only the destruction of *sanchita karma* and not *prArabdha karma*. Sometimes it says this explicitly as in "*sanchita-pApa vinAshaka lingam*" in *LingAshhTakaM*. *PrArabdha karma* has to be exhausted only by experiencing it.

DDW: But it is our attitude to the experience that changes according to our trust in God.

TD: That is where our level of spiritual evolution enters the picture. A trust in God and his omnipotence does not mean that we 'believe' in Fate. It is wrong to think so. It is the first step for the correct understanding of Hindu philosophy and spirituality.

DFW : Does not the omnipotence of God mean that unless He wills it we cannot become spiritual?

TD: You are raising the right question at the right time. Your question brings home to us another point that is mentioned in our *smritis*. You know there are four goals of life. These are called '*purushArthas*' in Sanskrit. They are *Dharma*, *artha*, *kAma* and *mokSha*. – meaning broadly, Duty of Righteousness, material prosperity, satisfaction of sensual desires and release from the samsAra bondage. Of these, the *smritis* would say, only *artha* and *kAma* are obtained as per one's *prArabdha karma*. The other two, *Dharma* and *mokSha* are obtained only by self-effort. That is why '*satyam vada*' and '*Dharmam chara*' are specific injunctions to us. Self effort is the most essential ingredient for lifting ourselves upward in the ladder of spiritual evolution.

DDW: If the upward path to higher levels of spirituality has to be chalked out only by our effort then where comes the question of divine will? You are confusing me now.

TD: We have to go slow now. We all have to start our lives with the hypothesis of absolute free will. It is the sheet-anchor on which we base all our actions. But as we move forward along the journey of life, we learn lessons from the world and we become wiser to the ways of the world as also to the ways of the Lord.

DFW: Are you saying that our world experience takes us away from belief in free will? I feel it is the contrary. For it is by persistent and continuous self-effort great achievers have achieved what they are known to have achieved.

TD: I don't deny that. By the same persistent and continuous self-effort one learns that unless we bid farewell to a self-centred life we cannot rise spiritually. So the path to higher levels of spirituality needs a strong free will to strengthen the inner life rather than the outer life. That is why the smritis say the goals *Dharma* and *mokSha* are sought only by self-effort.

DDW: The common man thinks Faith in God is superstition. Superstition is what holds you when you think negatively. But Faith is some kind of intuition which makes you, through your own free will, reach out and contact the most positive thing in the universe, namely, the Supreme Almighty.

TD: Wonderfully said, DDW. It is that spark of Faith which we have to keep fanning until with the blessing of a *Guru* it blows up into a Fire of Wisdom (*jnAnAgni*). That way one develops a God-centred nature.

DFW: Earlier you said that it is world-experience that gradually takes us into the belief in a divine will. Where does that stand in the light of this necessity to fan the so-called Faith?

TD: If we carefully analyse the world-experience of ourselves as well as of others, slowly it would appear that, try what we may, certain happenings which seemed to be totally in our control have slipped away from us and we feel that an invincible but invisible forceis pulling us. This inevitability of events strikes us in the face.

DFW: But as we grow older I think we move from the childhood beliefs of naivete, myth and superstition to the adult days of self-effort and freedom of free will.

TD: You have to move farther to learn the lessons of philosophy. All along we have been thinking that *prArabdha karma* starts our life with its own prescriptions of initial conditions and limitations on our mind, intellect and environment and that all the rest is our free will. All along we have believed that it is our *prakRti* which is the result of our *prArabdha karma*, that does everything and is the cause of all action. But this theory is too mechanical to be ultimate. Even though Lord Krishna says this in the third chapter of the Gita, later he modifies it. *PrakRti* is inert and to say that it is the doer and enjoyer is to accept the sentient self to be in the control of the insentient *prakRti*.

DDW: I see you are referring to the theory of *purushha* and *prakRti* in the thirteenth chapter of the *Gita*.

TD: Yes, we have to bring in the sentient *Purusha* now. In the innermost recesses of man there is a Consciousness which is *Purush*a rather than *PrakRti*. *PrakRti* is only the

force of the *Purusha*. It is this *Purusha* that makes the *PrakRti* work through the lower self.

DDW: The free will that we have been holding on to is not any more free. Our will, though powerful as we thought, has only a limited power.

DFW: Will aims at the end; but Power is the means to attain that end.

DDW: Will without power is helpless to provide the means to attain the end. Power without will is purposeless because it has no end in view.

TD: There cannot be any Power without Consciousness. And there cannot be Consciousness without Power. The will-power we thought was ours comes really from the consciousness within. And that Consciousness is the *Purusha*.

DDW: The *Gita* makes a very impassioned appeal for us to surrender to the *Purusha* within. After showing His cosmic form to Arjuna, Krishna declares: I have already conquered and vanquished all your enemies; be only an instrument of my action. Go and fight.

DFW: You already quoted this in Sanskrit on the first day of our conversation and I said that is what always confuses me.

TD: But now we can understand it. The plea of the *Gita* is for us to be the instrument of the Will of God, that is, this *Purusha*. We have to be like the needle in a gramaphone which only traces the channels already chalked out for it by the designer of the record.

DDW: In other words, we only walk over the path already dictated by God for us.

TD: Listen to Him for His voice. Throw the responsibility on Him. Abandon all your *Dharmas,* meaning, abandon the doership attitude of all actions. You are not the doer. He is the doer. This is the greatest renunciation, greatest surrender.

DFW: But still we have not found an answer to the fundamental question I raised earlier. I can now rephrase that question in the light of the theory that the *Purusha* within is what makes the *PrakRti* the doer. In that case, then, the same *Purushh*a should be held responsible for all my bad thoughts and actions. Originally I asked whether God is the one who should take responsibility. Now we have come to the conclusion it is the *Purusha*. But the *Purushh*a is the same as the cosmic Almighty, if I understand advaita right. So then, that brings us back to square one!

TD: Your logic is certainly reasonable. But you are missing one more bit of information from the fifteenth chapter of the *Gita*. Maybe we should take it up when we meet afresh.

DFW: What is it that I am missing from the fifteenth chapter of the *Gita*?

TD: It is the fact that there are two purushhas instead of one.

DFW: Both sentient?

TD: Yes, both sentient. By themselves mind and intellect are not sentient. The spark of the Infinite Consciousness that resides in us as the sentient *Purusha* is the source of this sentience. This spark is the *JIva* But the *JIva* cannot express itself in any manner except through the BMI. When it so expresses itself, an identification takes place between *jIva* on the one side and the BMI on the other side. This identification results in a conscious personality which is what goes by the ordinary name of 'I'. This is one *purushha*. It is the perishable purushha (*kshara-purushha*). If on the other hand *JIva* disassociates itself from the BMI and remains as the spark of Consciousness that it really is, then it is the imperishable purshha within. It is known as the *akshara-purushha*. Thus there are two *purushhas*.

DFW. So who is responsible for my actions, good or bad? Who is the doer?

TD: It is only the perishable *purushha*. The other one is imperishable, unattached, unaffected, unpolluted, and immutable. It is the real 'I'. The perishable *purushha* is the false 'I' or the lower self. The real 'I' is the higher Self.

DDW: Shall we say then that the real doer of actions is this perishable *purushha*?

TD: In a sense, yes. Not only he is the doer but suffers the result of his doings. He it is that goes from body to body and suffers all the fruits of actions.

DFW: Then what does the other *purushha* (the imperishable) do?

TD: He is untouched by anything. All our Upanishads as well as all the great teachers of advaita from Shankara downwards tell us to identify ourselves with the divine within and thus be unaffected by the ups and downs that the *kshara purushha* goes through.

DFW: I still don't understand it. What exactly do you mean by 'identification'. Is it just a posture? How does it translate into action? The discussion has now taken such a turn that we have forgotten why we started the discussion. Where have the Free Will and Divine Will gone now?

DDW: We have not strayed. We are still trying to understand Divine Will. Because it is the purushha within, whose presence in us makes us will, act and feel through our BMI, it is common in Vedanta to say that the outer self has no control and it is the inner self that is the motor behind it.

TD: One of you mentioned earlier the concept of 'action in inaction'. This is it. The inner Self does nothing but in its presence everything happens. But for its presence nothing would happen.

DDW: This concept of the inner self as the power behind all our actions gets translated for general understanding to say it is all divine will. Common folk understand by this statement that God is sitting there in his throne and dispensing all decisions and actions! The bottomline lesson is that we have to be in harmony with that 'divine will' in order to live and die in peace. The identification means that you should be constantly aware that you (the real You) are neither the doer of actions nor the experiencer of the consequences. '*na ahaM kartA, na aham bhoktA*'. Your mind thinks, your hands and feet act; but You are only a witness to all of these.

DFW: I feel this identification business is tricky. I think there is some blurring here.

TD: Let me try to explain. Whenever we act, we think we are the doer of the action. Actually we are thinking of the false 'I' here. The 18th chapter of the *Gita* elaborates four others that have a part in the action. One is called '*adhiShTAnaM*', the support or base of all action. In other words it is the conglomerate of natural forces that constitute the field of action.

DDW: The next is the toality of the different senses which form the instrument of action. The third is the set of circumstances or the context. The fourth is variously called Fate or Divine Element; actually it is the set of *vAsanAs* as we know, that have inspired the action.

TD: Thus the false 'I' together with these four accessories become the agents of action..

DFW: The difference between this false 'I' and the real 'I' is only in the attitude. Right?

TD: But the attitude or bhAvanA is everything. This is the crux of the entire philosophy of advaita. The doer or kartA is the individual mental attitude which unifies itself with the external things like body, senses and the mind to the extent that it thinks they are itself. This process of attitudinal unification is what is called identification.

DDW: On the other hand, the real 'I', the deeper Self, stands aloof as Witness, *sAkShI*.

TD: If now our mental attitude is perfectly tuned to identify itself with the sAkShI behind, then the five participants to the action are outside us. We can then clearly say "*na ahaM kartA, na ahaM bhoktA*" (I am not the doer or the experiencer).

DDW: But all the four agents of action belong to *PrakRti* or its effects and the fifth namely the kshara purushha, is also an effect of the mAyic spell over us. So it is also right to say that *PrakRti* is the doer.

DFW: But earlier we concluded that *PrakRti*, being insentient, cannot be the doer and it is He, the inner self, that is the doer.

TD: It is now clear, after the analysis in the 18th chapter, in what sense we are saying that *PrakRti* is the doer. It is the false inner self along with the four other agents of action that is the doer. Thus *PrakRti* together with the sentience of the false self becomes the doer.

DFW: It is all pretty complicated.

DDW: That is why, to the common folk, we simply say, that the spirit within us, which is divine, is the doer. And they further simplify it by saying that it is all divine will.

TD: ... which is right after all, since it is the spark of Consciousness that sparks the *mAyA* that causes our false self to say what it says.

DDW : I feel greatly relieved now. I feel I understand it all.

DFW. Do you, really? Then can you answer the question: Does the 'divine' have free will?

DDW: I know you are trying to trap me. To say it does not have free will is absurd because we ourselves have free will in some measure. To say the divine has free will also leads to absurd supplementaries.

DFW: Like what?

DDW: Like what you yourself pointed out earlier. Free will implies options to choose from. Does the divine choose from several options? Why does it choose one of them? In that case is the divine so ignorant of the future to have to choose from its options? What governs its choice? Nature or *PrakRti*? Is the divine a slave to Nature? It cannot be. What desire makes the divine choose? If the divine is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, why does He have to have options, choices, freedom to choose or not to choose? Why? Why? Does it not all add up to saying that the divine is a bundle of contradictions?

TD: Wonderful. The divine Godhead in Hinduism is difficult to conceive of because it simultaneously possesses 'contradictory' qualities. There is no parallel in this finite world of ours. The divine has no desire, yet He has will! He chooses and chooses not! He intervenes and He also never intervenes, only watches! He has options but each option is His own Will! He knows the future, yet He chooses to act! The future is what He makes of the present. Nature or *PrakRti* is His slave, yet He allows Nature to take its

course. He is Personal, but not personal in the 'worldly' sense, because He is all-knowing. He is perfect, not in the sense of free from limitations, because limitations don't exist outside of His will! Yes, He is a bundle of contradictions, if you yourself don't have Faith in your Self!

DDW: Therefore the plea for us is only this: Be the instrument of the Will of this Self and nothing more.

TD: The so-called free will itself is in the ultimate sense an expression of Grace as MA AnandamayI would say. If one makes the right spiritual effort Divine Power would be with him. Thereafter whatever he does would be nothing but expressions of the divine will. This identification with the divine will and to work in the world simply as an instrument of His will, fo

rm the crux of the theory of Surrender to God.

DDW: But we should beware. Such injunctions like 'Be the instrument of God's Will' and associated ideas about the not-so-free free will are only for those who are already a few steps up in the spiritual ladder.

DFW: How does one know that one is up in the ladder?

TD: Ask yourself, whether these injunctions make sense to you. If they do, then you are ready to rise further. If they do not, then your will is still free!

Om ShAntiH ShantiH ShantiH!

CHAPTER 3: MEET THE ANCIENT SCRIPTURES

1. Shruti

The primary source of Hinduism from which it derives all its authority and inspiration is the body of literature known as the vedas. They constitute the oldest religious literature of the world. They consist of two main divisions, the Mantras and the Brahmanas – the former containing chants and prayers and the latter containing a sort of commentary on the former, but both having equal authority. All are eternal, being revelations to the Rishis. A mantra may be in verse with fixed feet and syllables. Then it is known as a Rik. Otherwise it is called Yajus. A rik that can be sung is called a Saman. The three classes of mantras are grouped into four compilations or Samhitas. These are the four Vedas which have the names Rg veda, Yajur-veda, sAma veda, and atharva-veda. Each Samhita had one or more Brahmanas only a few of which are extant. Some of the Brahmanas have a portion called Aranyaka in which are found one or more Upanishads. The Samhitas as well as the Brahmanas had various rescensions or ShAkhas (branches) according to the original Rishis to whom they were revealed, and after whom they were named

The most important thing to note is the fact that the Vedas were not written by any single person or persons. In fact they were not 'written' at all, until, in the nineteenth century, they were put into print. Till then, over the centuries, they were transmitted orally. It is one of the amazing miracles of the Indian heritage that, while even the written literature of great authors like Kalidasa and Shakespeare have today more than one reading or version at several points, the Vedas, which go back to 3000 B.C. have, in spite of being handed down entirely through oral transmission, come down to us in a single version. Throughout the length and breadth of India, where the Vedas are treasured as the most ancient heritage, not a syllable of them is different in one place from what it is everywhere else.

How can this be? How was it possible? In spite of its massive content, (*Rg veda* and *Yajur veda* have 153,826 words 109,287 words respectively) have been preserved from generation to generation though it was all done only by oral transmission. All this has been preserved (till today) for more than five millenia (at least three millenia acc. to western calculations) without ever putting them into writing. This must be considered a great lingusitic achievement of which India can be legitimately proud. The literature, which consists of diverse poetical and prose compositions were simply learnt by rote, the training being given by the teacher saying each word or combinations of words once with the proper incantations (called *svaras*) and the students saying it twice. They then learnt to recite it in continuous form along with the incantations. The continuous recitation of a vedic text is called *samhita pAtha*. The accuracy of the text is preserved by resorting to an artifice of nine different techniques or modes of recital.

The first is the *pada pATha*, which simply recites each word of the text separately; *pada* means word; *pAtha* means reading.The euphonic changes that occurs from the *samhita pATha* to the *pada pATha* is itself very technical (Sanskrit grammar would be crucial here) but makes sense. In addition, there are eight other techniques of recitation, the sole purpose of each is to preserve the original samhita text without the loss or addtion of a single syllable or *svara*. The *svaras* are a significant part of the recital of the vedas, whatever be the mode. The eight modes are called:

krama, jaTa, ghana, mAlA, ratha, SikhA, daNDa and *rekhA*.

In each mode the order of recital of the words is specified as a particular permutation of their original sequence. We give below a sentence from the Yajur veda, obviously without the *svaras*, in its original *samhita pATha* form, also its *pada* text and then the order of the words in the *ghana* recital. A pundit who has learnt the *ghana* recital of one complete veda (he takes thirteen years of whole time work to reach that stage) is called a *Ghana-pAThi*.

First we give the rule for the *ghana* mechanics of recitation: If the original order of words in a sentence is:

1/2/3/4/5

The *ghana* recital goes as follows:

12/21/123/321/123/
23/32/234/432/234/
34/43/345/543/345/
45/54/45/
5 iti 5.

Example: *samhita* sentence:

eshAm purushANAm-eshAm paSUnAM mA bher-mA ro-mo eshAM kincanAmamat //

Meaning:

Oh God! Do not frighten these our men and animals, may none of these perish or lack health.

pada text:

eshAM/purushANAM/eshAM/paSUnAM/mA/bheH/mA/arah/mo-iti-mo/eshAM/ kim/chana/Amamat/Amamad-ity-Amamat/

Note: The ninth break here and the last break are the results of a technicality which the reader may ignore, unless one wants to specialise in this art.

Now for the *ghana* recital(without the *svaras*; with the *svaras* it would be a delight to hear). The recital is a non-stop recital, except for a half-pause at the place shown by / . There is no break anywhere else. The hyphens shown are for requirements of those who can decipher the grammar ; they will not be reflected in the recital.

eshAM-purushANAM-purushANAm-eshAm-eshAM purushANAm-eshAm-eshAm purushANAm-eshAm-eshAm purushANAm-eshAM /
purushANAm-eshAm-eshAM purushANAM purushANAm-eshAM paSUnAM paSunAm-eshAm purushANAm purushANAm-eshAM paSUnAM /
eshAM paSUnAM paSUnAm-eshAm-eshAM paSUnAm-mA mA paSUnAm-eshAm-eshAM paSUnAm-mA /
paSUnAm-mA mA paSUnAM paSUnAm-mA bher-bher-mA paSUnAM paSUnAm-mA bheH /
mA bher-bher-mAmA bher-mAmA bher-mAmA bher-mA /
bher-mAmA bher-bher-mAro aro mA bher-bhermA araH /
mA ro aro mAmA ro momo aro mA mA ro mo /
aro mo mo aro aro mo eshAm-eshAm mo aro aro mo eshAM /
mo eshAm-eshAm mo mo eshAm kim kim-eshAm-mo mo eshAm kim / mo iti mo/
eshAm kimkim-eshAmeshAM kim-cana cana kim-esham-eshaM kim-cana /
kim cana cana kim kim canAmamad-Amamat cana kim kim canAmamat /canAmamad-Amamac-cana canAmamat /Amamad-ityAmamat /

The significant point to note here is that in Sanskrit the order of words does not matter for the meaning of the sentence. If you do it with an English sentence like:

Rama vanquished Ravana

It will go like this:

Rama vanquished vanquished Rama Rama vanquished Ravana 'Ravana vanquished Rama' Rama vanquished Ravana ... and so on.

You can see the absurdity now. In Sanskrit this absurdity would not arise. So a *ghana* recitation is supposed to be equivalent to a recitation of the veda 13 times and to that extent is multifold fruitful! The 13 is because except for two beginning and two ending words in a sentence the others are repeated 13 times. (It can be checked with the word *paSUnAM* above).

Orthodox opinion holds that the vedas are eternal. The significance of this will be understood only if the concept of Time in Hindu cosmology is understood.

In Hindu cosmology and metaphysics it is not accepted that the universe was created out of nothing at a particular point of time. For if something is created or born, it has to be dissolved, has to die. Strictly the conservation principle applies here. The universe was created, according to the Vedas, only by transformation of something which was latent before that. One such Vedic statement says:

sUryA-candramasau dhAtA yathA pUrvam-akalpayat /M.N.U.1 – 13
Sun & Moon were created by the Creator as they were earlier.

Creation is just a manifestation of what was unmanifest before. *SrshTi* and *SamhAra*, Creation and Dissolution, are only two events in a long cyclic succession of events. There is no beginning or end. This alternation between manifestation and non-manifestation is what appears as the passage of time. Manifestation is when the universe of names and forms appears and non-manifestation is when it disappears. The only Ultimate Reality is Brahman. Even BrahmA the Creator is only a manifestation of the Absolute Brahman at one point of time. He is the womb from which the entire universe becomes manifest and He is the One into which the entire universe dissolves. Each period of this manifestation is a day of BrahmA. From one day of BrahmA to another day, that is, from one period of manifestation to another such, many things survive in their latent forms. Among these are the Vedas – it is in this sense that the Vedas are eternal – and the complex of prints of individual minds with their store of impressions called VasanAs. These survive the 'night' of BrahmA, the period of non-manifestation. The lengths of these days and nights in this long cycle of events have been elaborately described in the scriptures. The units mentioned therein are fantastically large and mind-boggling and a modern mind may be tempted to dismiss them as concoctions. But the consistency with which different scriptures written at different times in the past reveal the magnitudes of these units, called yugas, is remarkable.

To be precise, a mahA-yuga, also called 'chatur-yuga', is an age or epoch. It consists of four yugas which repeat in a cyclic order. Each cycle of four yugas consists of

A KRta-yuga or Satya-yuga of 1,728,000 human years;
a tretA-yuga of 1,296,000 years,
a dvApara-yuga of 864,000 human years and
a kali-yuga of 432,000 human years.

Thus one mahA-yuga has a duration of 4.32 million human years. 1008 such mahA-yugas make a day of BrahmA and is called a 'kalpa'. Cf. B.G. 8 – 17:

Sahasra-yuga-paryantam ahar-yad-brahmaNo viduH /
Those who know the day of BrahmA
as a thousand (mahA-)yugas in duration.

We are told that in this recurrent cycle of yugas we are now in kaliyuga which started in 3102 B.C.E. What is the proof, you may ask. What is the proof that today is, say, Thursday? The only proof is that yesterday was Wednesday. The proof that when you were born it was such and such a day is that your mother told you it was so. Though India has been criticized for its lack of historical sense, people in India have been doing a good job in terms of keeping track of the calendar, irrespective of the life-history of any individual. The rituals that every Hindu goes through, both on auspicious occasions like marriage and (certainly) on inauspicious occasions like death always start with the fixation of time and date in the age-old calendar. In fact those who perform ritual worship

daily cannot but be aware of the calendar. In this way the exact date in the eternal cycle of the yugas has been passed on to us from generation to generation.

Let us come to what the vedas talk about. They talk about creation, Nature and God. They sing ecstatically about the bounties of Mother Nature. They glorify the majesty that is transparent in the workings of nature. They contain long, prosaic instructions on rituals to be followed for propitiating various gods. They make impressive poetic appeals to the grace of these gods. They discuss life and death and everything that touches man in his journey through life.

The subject matter of the vedas is usually looked at in terms of three categories or parts, called kANDas, technically. These three parts are not physically separated in the vedas. Material relevant to all three subjects are scattered throughout the texts. The *karma kANDa* discusses the duties of an individual, particularly of a householder, the rites and sacrifices that he must perform and how he should perform them. In the *upAsana-kANDa* the theme is divine communion and worship. The *jnAna-kANDa* is metaphysical disquisition about ultimate reality and the transience of ordinary sensory experience. These excursions into metaphysics particularly occur in the last portions of the vedas, called the **Upanishads**.

Upanishads are excursions into metaphysics and philosophy occurring in the last portions of each branch of each veda. From out of the 1180 branches that are supposed to have existed 5000 years ago, at present only around 120 Upanishads are extant. Of these, ten are considered to be most fundamental. These are: **ISa, Kena, KaTha, PraSna, MunDaka, MANDUkya, TaittirIya, Aitareya, ChAndogya, BRhadAraNyaka** Upanishads.

In referring to these Upanishads in this book
we shall use the respective abbreviations :
I.U.; Ke.U.; Ka.U.; P.U.; Mu.U.;
Ma.U.; T.U.; A.U.; Ch.U.; Br.U.

Some other important Upanishads are: ShvetASvatara, Maitri, Kausitiki, NRsimha-pUrva-tApini, Kaivalya, AmRta-bindu, etc..

Over the centuries, the importance attached to the different portions of the vedas has been shifting. In modern times it is the Upanishads that make the strongest appeal. Some of them are very long and some very short. The Ma.U. has only twelve very short paragraphs in prose. The Br.U. is as long as the Biblical New Testament. Some Upanishads are in prose, some in verse. But all are discourses and dialogues about spiritual experiences. These dwell on fundamental questions about life, birth, death and man's ultimate objective.

What is the nature of the universe? What is meant by Absolute Reality? How was the world created? What is man's place in the universe? What is the purpose of his journey through life? What is knowledge? What are the means to acquire that knowledge? How

does one analyze one's mental experience? How does one reach the state of everlasting bliss, if there is one? What is meant by God? What is man's relationship with God?

All such questions are daringly posed and relentlessly pursued. The theme usually ends up declaring: THE DIVINE IS ESSENTIALLY IN THE DEPTH OF ONE'S OWN SELF.TAP IT. BE IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH IT. RECOGNIZE THAT DIVINITY IN THE SELF OF EVERY BEING. ACT IN THE LIVING PRESENT GUIDED BY THAT AWARENESS. THAT IS THE WAY TO BE HAPPY, EVER.

Many portions of the Upanishads have been considered by philosophers all over the world to be the most profound records of human thought. Upanishads are therefore considered to be the crown jewel of the vedas. They tell us that we are not to wander everywhere in search of God. No such quest will reveal Him. He stays very close to us. But we have to transcend the very time and space which limit our vision. It is the alternating states of the mind which are caused by the interplay of time and space that delude us. The Upanishads tell us to long to be free from the play of time and space and ultimately realise the Truth by self-experience. For a more detailed account of the Upanishads see the Section on Upanishads under the chapter 'The Absolute as it is'.

2: SmRti

Besides the *Shruti*, which is the primary source of authority for everything in Hinduism, there is a secondary set of scriptures collectively called the *smRti* - the word meaning 'that which is remembered and transmitted'. The *smRtis* contain all the rules and regulations for the individual in relation to the family, society, the ancestors and the gods, compiled and collected by great sages of the past. Almost all the daily practices in Hinduism can be traced to these secondary scriptures. But whenever any doubt arises as to the credentials of a rite, rule, stipulation, or concept, it is the voice of the vedas (*Shruti*) that prevails. The *smrtis* may change from time to time, from place to place, but *Shruti* is eternally valid.

The *smRtis* have their immediate authority in the *kalpas*, which are one of the six limbs of the vedas, known as *vedAngas*.

> The six limbs of the Vedas are: *SikshA* (the science which teaches proper articulation and pronunciation of vedic texts), *vyAkaraNa* (Grammar), *chandas* (Metrical Science), *nirukta* (Etymology), *jyotisha* (Astrology) and *kalpa*.

In fact the *kalpa-sUtras* are the most complete of the six Vedangas. They prescribe the rituals and give rules for ceremonial and sacrificial acts. They are written in the form of aphorisms (*sUtras*) and present an orderly and consolidated list of duties to be performed by people in their various stations of life, at various times of the day, according to their *varNa*.

Almost all the traditional prescriptions of Hinduism are intended to help the mind rid itself of all its load so that in that pure mind God will reflect Himself. The numberless impurities of the mind act like an indelible coating on the mind and hide the presence of

the divinity within. All the rules and regulations that these *SmRtis* prescribe for one's daily life are programmed to inculcate a habit in us which would be consistent with the ultimate requirement of cleansing our mind from all its dirt. In Hindu metaphysics an object is said to have dirt when it has in it something other than itself. So a dirtless mind is a mind which does not contain anything other than the mind! That mind is the crystalline mind in which God will reflect Himself. All the religious habits enjoined by the *SmRtis* are designed such that, when the time comes for us to look Godward instead of outward, we shall not have to unlearn any of our habits. Since the mind is a storehouse of everything that has gone into it (for several lives, though now present only in a subtle manner in the form of *VAsanAs*) and this storehouse cannot be emptied by the pressing of a single button, the only way the mind can be purified and made 'dirtless' is by diluting its contents through a constant input of noble, elevated thoughts and those thinking processes which are concordant with the upward path to divine perfection. This is the ultimate purpose of all rituals, ceremonies, observances and penances.

All aspects of human activity are dealt with in these *sUtras*. The *gRhya-sUtras* describe domestic rites. The *Srauta-sUtras* are concerned with the big sacrifices for which there are elaborate catalogues of *mantras* in the vedas. The *Dharma-sUtras* of (Apastambha, Gautama and others) describe the personal and social duties of people.

Eighteen great sages have by their insight of the vedas grasped the intentions of the vedas and given us compilations in verse form (i.e., *Shloka* form). This is how each *smRti* has been born. Each *smRti* is known by the sage who compiled it. Examples are:

Manu *smRti*, Yajnavalkya *smRti*, Parasara *smRti*, Gautama smRti, etc.

In my experience of exposition of the Ramayana, I find the following question (by an NRI) and the reply (given by me then and reproduced below from the book 'Hinduism for the next generation'), will perhaps shake up some ultra-modern young minds. Since it leans heavily on Manu *smRti* and brings out very well the hold that the *smRtis* have on believers in *sanAtana Dharma*, I refer to it here.

Question: Why does Hinduism extol the action of Rama in implicitly obeying his father and step-mother to go to the forest? How do we tell this to modern children who are not able to appreciate the logic behind this?

The entire scriptural literature with all its *purANas*, legends and stories are one on this point that a father's word is law for the son. In ancient times this was so much of a truism that nobody even wanted a justification for this. Indeed when Bharata and all his elders and courtiers went to the Chitrakuta hermitage to bring back Rama to Ayodhya,

For those who need to know the context of this in the Ramayana, may go to the elementary narration of the story under the section on ItihAsa..

And when there was a long plea by Bharata to Rama that the latter should simply come back, because every one wants him back and Bharata would even substitute for him in the forest, Rama begins by saying only one sentence which seals the conversation for the

day, even though all the great ministers, counsellors and rishis were present there. This one sentence is a half verse in Valmiki Ramayana and runs thus (V.R.: Ayodhya-kanda, 104 - 22 Southern Recension.)

mAtA-pitRbhyAm-ukto'ham katham-anyat samAcare?

This means: When I have been told so by my mother and father, how can I do otherwise? Nobody had any reply to this powerful statement. They all dispersed for the day. The conversation resumed the next morning with Bharata opening up new angles of approach. Well, the story goes on!

For our purpose we should only note here how electrical the effect of that single statement was on that august assemblage of scholars, elders and experts. In order to tell our present day kids why every one in the Hindu cultural milieu considers this obedience to father and mother so important, let us go to Manu smRti for the relevant portion which stipulates and justifies this universal requirement of Hindu Dharma. If there is anything in Hindu scriptures which may be considered to be as powerful and as emphatic and precise as the Ten Commandments of Christendom, it is this portion of the Manu *smRti*. We just quote seven *Shloka*s:

1.yam mAtA pitarau kleSaM sahete sambhave nRNAM /na tasya nishkRtis-ShakyA kartuM varsha-Shatair-api // There is nothing in the three worlds which can compensate for the pains and sufferings that the parents, mother and father, have gone through in bringing up the son both at the time of birth and after. Even in one hundred years one cannot repay the debt which one owes to them.

2.tayor-nityaM priyaM kuryAt acAryasya ca sarvadA / teshveva trishu tushTeshu tapaH sarvaM samApyate // To the two of them and to the *guru*, one should always do what is pleasing to them. If these three are satisfied, all *Dharma*, penances and obligations stand fulfilled.

3. teshAM trayANAM ShuSrUshA paramaM tapa ucyate /na tair-abhyananujnAto Dharmam-anyaM samAcaret // The service to these three is the *summum bonum* of all penances. Without their permission no other Dharma should be observed.

4. ta eva hi trayo lokA ta eva traya ASramAH /ta eva hi trayo vedAH ta evoktAs-trayo-guNAH // They are the three worlds (*bhur, bhuvaH, suvaH*) they are the three *ASramas* (*brahmacarya, gRhasta, vAna-prastha*) they are the three vedas (Rg, Yajur, SAma) and they are the three sacred Fires of the Vedic tradition.

5. pitA vai gArhya-patyogniH mAtA-gnir-dakshiNas-smRtaH /gurur-AhavanIyastu sAgni-tretA garIyasI // The father is the *gArhapatya* Fire, the mother is the *dakshiNa* Fire, the *guru* is the *AhavanIya* Fire. This Trinity of the three Fires is most sacred.

6. yAvat-trayaste jIveyuH tAvan-nAnyaM samAcaret /teshveva nityaM s shuSrUshAM kuryAt priya-hite rataH // As long as these three are living one should not have to observe any other *Dharma* or penance. Anyone who is interested in his well being should serve daily these three most sincerely.

7. trish-vetesh-viti kRtyaM hi purushasya samApyate /esha DharmaH paras-sAkshAt upa-dharmo'nya ucyate // A man's entire obligation for life is fulfilled if these three are taken care of. This is the supreme-most *Dharma*. Everything else is only a secondary *Dharma*.

Because of the abundance of *smRtis*, and all of them are man-made, differences that may exist between them need to be reconciled. These have been done from time to time according to the age in which we live in. The people in Maharashtra follow the *'Dharma sindhu*' by Kasi Nath Upadhyaya. In South India the book *'Vaidyanatha dIkshitIyam'* written by Vaidyanatha Dikshidar is followed. Both the books have been there for more than two centuries. These two people have boldly reconciled all the contradictions in the various *smRtis*. And finally they always say: Wherever there appears to be an unresolved contradiction, follow the tradition of elders in your family. It is this culture of importance to family tradition that is at the root of the universal respect given to age and to elders in the Hindu milieu.

Very often a crisis of intellect expresses itself in an orthodox setting. It is that of a dogmatic pursuit of a ritual or what one holds to be a *dharmic* principle. Since external exhibitions or expressions of *Dharma* change from age to age, a dogmatic pursuit of such an exposition beyond the times for which it was valid can ultimately lead to a situation where the primary *Dharma* of compassion and non-violence is jeopardized. The classic response of Vyasa, when asked to summarize the limitless scriptures that he had produced was:

paropakAraH puNyAya pApAya para-pIDanaM.

Meaning, Merit (*puNya*) is the what helps others and sin (*pApa*) is what hurts others.

It is in this breed of arrogant upholding of the so-called *Dharma* that practices like *sati* perhaps got generated without an eyebrow being raised. While it is true that *Manu smRti* talks of woman having no independent status because, 'in her childhood she is dependent on the father, in her youth and middle ages she is dependent on the husband and in her old age she is dependent on the son' - the same Manu smRti insists very emphatically that every man should act in such a way that not a single tear rolls down the cheek of a woman, for, if it does so, continues the smRti, 'the person who caused that tear-drop will be destroyed with his whole clan'!. If the followers of *Manu smRti* had only taken this seriously, women in Hindu society would have been put on the highest pedestal -- which is what perhaps is indicated in the Indian habit of addressing or greeting every unrelated woman as 'Mother' or 'Sister' . But custom and tradition forced themselves away from the spirit of ancient times. They thrust humiliating and unfair norms on the woman of the household, particularly when she lost her husband, just as, at the social level, a caste-ridden arrogance created and sustained the practice of untouchability.

The touchstone of Hindu *Dharma* is therefore the attitude with which one acts. One has to analyze oneself constantly. Whether it is a question of interpretation of caste rules, or a question of the meaning of the partnership between husband and wife , father and son, teacher and disciple, elder and younger -- whatever it may be, the choice between what is

Dharma and what is *aDharma* should be made only on the basis of absence or presence of an internal selfishness, irrespective of what the secondary scriptures, like *Manu smRti* have to say. Even if there is an iota of selfishness in what one is doing or saying, then there is the contamination of *aDharma* in it.

Selfishness may be of two kinds: one, which ultimately aims at a personal benefit of mundane return, or psychological satisfaction; and the other, may be of sense gratification. Only those actions, words and thoughts which are completely free of either type of selfishness are dharmic. Pursuit of a dharmic principle as a dogma (for instance, irrespective of its social consequences) may ultimately end in nothing but self-gratification that one is upholding *Dharma*. Any time the thought comes to you that you are the upholder of *Dharma* and you are indispensable for the *Dharma* to be nurtured, you may rest assured that egoism has set in and you have strayed from *Dharma*. *Dharma* is a very subtle concept. Even a divine incarnation like Rama who had every right to flaunt his observance of *Dharma*, did not do so; he did not have the slightest egoistic pride that could lead him to proclaim that he was making the greatest sacrifice (of renouncing his right to be coronated as the prince of Ayodhya) for the sacrifice of *Dharma*. His humility even prevented him from going beyond the simple statement, even in intense debates about the dilemma of right and wrong, that, 'Having been told by my mother and father to do what I am doing, how can I do otherwise?'

Those Hindus who have gone to Gaya (in Bihar) on pilgrimage to perform the rites due to their ancestors would recall how much of an importance is given to the concept 'Mother' during the ceremonies there. At the end of all the rites, there is the rite of offering *piNDas* (balls of cooked rice ritually offered to ancestors, who are no more) at the foot of the ageless banyan tree there, called *akshaya-vaTa*. All the ancestors, other relatives, elders, other kith and kin and well-wishers who are not alive, are each offered just one *piNDa*. But the (deceased) mother, mother alone, is offered 16 *piNDas*. For each of these sixteen, a statement in the form of a *Shloka* is recited, paying gratitude to the mother for all that she did. For instance, the *Shlokas* go somewhat like this:

> You bore me with great pain for ten months; this *piNDa* is in gratitude for that. You suffered kicks by me in your womb; this *piNDa* is in gratitude for that. You controlled your appetite for spicy and difficult-to-digest stuff because you did not want me in your womb to be hurt; this *piNDa* is for that. You suffered untold pangs of labour pain when I was born; this is the *piNDa* for that. After I was born you breast-fed me at the proper times, amidst all your busy schedule. This *piNDa* is for that. You suffered the pain of my biting into you, when my teeth began to grow; this *piNDa* is for that. You were on all sorts of restricted diet in order to save me from illness; this one is for that. You woke up at all odd times of nights to feed me; this one is for that.

It goes on like this sixteen times, mentioning everything that the mother must have done, and offering a *piNDa* in gratitude. You think of anything that you do to your children as a mother; it is listed there. When one hears these sixteen statements and the offering of the *piNDas* at the *akshaya-vaTa*, one will almost go into tears.

3. ItihAsa

The three categories of scripture, namely, *itihAsa, purANa*, and *Aagama* constitute the bulwark of popular Hinduism. The word *itihAsa* splits as *iti-ha-Asa* and means thus-verily-happened. Therefore *itihAsa* means history as it truly happened. It consists of the two great epics: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana of Valmiki (pronounced *vAlmIki*) has 24000 *Shlokas* and the Mahabharata of Vyasa (pronounced *vyAsa)* has 100,000. A *Shloka* in Sanskrit generally means a verse with certain stipulated rhythm in terms of short and long syllables, with (at least) 32 syllables in all. Valmiki is known as the earliest poet (*Adi-kavi*) since he was the first author in Sanskrit who produced *Shlokas*, which was the style adopted by Vyasa later and all writers after Vyasa. Before Valmiki's time there were only the *mantras* of the vedas, which were terse and difficult to understand. While the vedas are cryptic, and sometimes very prosaic, sophisticated and abstract, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata form a popular veda and provide the simplest and most graphic introduction to Hindu thought, culture and philosophy. Through their chronicles of great epic events they have captivated succeeding generations by their insight into human behaviour and their unexcelled simple style of narration, enriched by a symbiosis of profundity of thought and naivety of context. Indeed in all of history, Valmiki and Vyasa are the two authors (in the world!) who have influenced *the largest number of people for the longest period of time.*

In the same style of thinking, Rama and Krishna, who are the divines embedded in the two epics respectively, are the Divinities, among all such that ever walked on earth, who have captured the hearts of the largest number of people for the longest period of time.

Public and private recitations of these two epics are common and incessant and this testifies to the religious significance of the two works, which are not just epics in the western sense of the word, but which are scriptures, the very reading of which earns spiritual merit here and hereafter. Many national festivals are based on the stories of these two epics and innumerable Hindus are named after the characters therein. Every Hindu knows the story of the Ramayana and of the Mahabharata, purely by osmosis of the culture, if not by one's own reading. However, for the benefit of those who have not been exposed to the culture, here is an apology for a summary of the two works:

> Rama, along with his three brothers, Laksmana, Bharata and Satrughna, were born to Dasaratha, the King of Ayodhya after an elaborate ritual. Their birth itself was a strategic step in a divine cosmic effort to vanquish the demon king Ravana of Lanka who had used his supernatural powers to keep the divines under his thumb. Rama grows up as an ideal man, a role model, and was about to be coronated as the beloved prince of Ayodhya - when Fate plays a diabolical trick. The second Queen Kaikeyi, extracts a promise from the King that Rama will be sent to live in the forest for fourteen years and that her son, Bharata, will be crowned as the Prince Royal. Rama accepts the verdict most willingly because for him the words of the father and mother (though step-mother) are gospel. Sita, Rama's consort, and Lakshmana insist on accompanying him to the forest. In the forest Ravana conspires to kidnap Sita and imprison her in Lanka where he seeks her hand which she refuses in no uncertain terms. Rama and Lakshmana get the help of the monkey kingdom, led by their king Sugriva and their mighty warrior-minister Hanuman, to locate Sita in Lanka, then march to Lanka, wage a long war with Ravana and his clan, kill them all and redeem Sita. The fourteen years of exile are over and Rama returns to

Ayodhya, where his devoted brother, not accepting the crown connivingly earned for him by his mother, had kept the kingdom safe for his hero Rama. Rama becomes the King much to the pleasure of humans and celestials alike. Throughout the Ramayana, we see powerful arguments, valid for all time, about what is right and what is wrong. Nowhere else would one find an example of an obviously literary work like the Ramayana, composed for personal aesthetic satisfaction, permeating the life and culture of a whole nation, in the course of a few centuries -- to such an extent that it becomes a religious authority as important as the unwritten vedas themselves. It is said that when the Almighty Himself, who can be known only by the vedas, incarnated as Rama, the son of Dasaratha, the Vedas, on their part, incarnated in the very form of the Ramayana:

veda vedye pare pumsi jAte daSarathAtmaje/vdaH prAcetasAd-AsIt sAkshAd-rAmAyaNAtmanA //

The Mahabharata which is eight times longer than the longest piece of European literature, namely Homer's Iliad and Odyssey put together, is mainly the story of the Pandava princes, but there are hundreds of other major stories linked with the main narrative. The one hundred Kauravas, and the five Pandavas, are cousins, born of two brothers. The eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira, is the eldest of them all. But Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, is obsessed with the passion of ascending to the throne after his blind father, Dhritarashtra, who is on the throne. The rivalry leads to several horrendous schemes on the sly by Duryodhana, led by his uncle Sakuni, that finally the Pandavas and their beautiful Queen Draupadi have to undergo not only public humiliation but twelve years of exile in the forest and another year of living incognito. At the end of the thirteenth year, all negotiations fail, including the intervention of Lord Krishna Himself and the Great War ensues. Half of the Mahabharata is occupied with the 18 days of this Great War in which at least four million people die. Enriched by its many digressions and embellishments covering almost every field of human knowledge, the Mahabharata provides the simplest, most graphic, and most detailed introduction to Hindu thought, culture, vision, and practice of religion and philosophy. The innumerable debates on Dharma and ADharma provide the kaleidoscopic backdrop for the moral dilemmas valid for all time. You name any subject; there will be something significant in the Mahabharata about it. Politics and diplomacy, economics and finance, astrology, sports, wrestling, rules of conduct, prayers to God, birth and death, life before birth and after death, near-death-experience, philosophy, psychology, biography, chronology, geography, the origin of the world, cosmology, -- all find a place in it. And all this in easy to understand, simple Sanskrit. The famous Bhagavad-gita the most popular exposition of Hindu philosophy, religion and way of life expounded by Lord Krishna himself, is part of the Mahabharata. In fact so goes the saying: What Vyasa did not write about, does not exist! The ethical parts of the Mahabharata have so decisively influenced the later Hindu writing that it has been accepted as a Fifth veda!

As long as human beings remain what they are and are moved by passions and feelings, as long as the struggle between good and evil continues to rage in the human heart, as long as mankind is faced with the problems of war and peace, the Mahabharata will continue to remain a source of aesthetic enjoyment and moral and intellectual enjoyment. -- Jayaprakash Narayan, in his foreword to The Children's Mahabharata by Shanta Rameshwar Rao, Orient Longmans, 1968.

4. PurANa

Popular Hinduism mainly consists of the three categories of scriptures, namely, *itihAsa*, *purANa* and *Agama*. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata constitute what is known as *itihAsa*. In addition to the Mahabharata Vyasa wrote the eighteen *purANas* and the eighteen *upa-purANas*. These are chronicles and long narratives that popularize the content of the vedas by appealing to the reader's imagination. They are the magnifying glass for the ideas contained in the vedas.

Hundreds of special *vratas* and specialized forms of worship that are practised in different forms wherever Hindus reside, derive from one or other of these *purANas*. The very popular *satya-Narayana-pUjA*, for instance, goes back to five chapters in the *skanda-purANa*, dedicated to Lord subrahmaNya. Incidentally, it is the longest of the *purANas* and is only slightly shorter than the Mahabharata. The eighteen *purANas* add up to 400,000 *Shlokas*, four times the size of the Mahabharata. Of these eighteen, *Vishnu purANa*, considered as the chief authority almost like the Shruti by the followers of *viSishTAdvaita* philosophy, was written by Parasara, Vyasa's father. But Vyasa, just as he rearranged the vedas into various branches, also edited the *Vishnu purANa* and put it in its present form. The *purANas* together form a comprehensive encyclopaedia of all the mythology, legends and history of Hinduism.

Just one simple example. Sage Vasishta's wife Arundhati is considered in Indian mythology as the ideal wife embodying all the virtues that a married woman should possess. In all Indian Hindu marriages, among the many rituals, one that is important is the ritual of the bridegroom showing the star Arundhati among the Saptarishi-group of stars (known as the Big Dipper in the constellation Ursa Major) to the bride as if to indicate that the couple should be as close to each other in their life as Vasishta and Arundhati were. This ritual is gone through without anybody pausing – nobody has the time! – to understand or question the significance of this ritual. The Sapta rishi is made up of seven stars which are the Seven Great Sages of this era, namely, *Atri, Vasishta, Kashyapa, Gautama, Bharadwaja, Viswamitra and Jamadagni.* The Big Dipper is in the form of a bowl (rectangular) made up of four stars and three stars in the curved handle. The two stars in the bowl away from the handle are called the Pointers; they together point to the Polaris which is almost at the Celestial Pole. The middle star in the handle is Vasishta, known as *Mizar* in Western terminology. Alongside *Mizar* there is a tiny faintly shining star known by its Arabic name *Alcor*. In Indian tradition it is known as *Arundhati*, the model of chastity, the eighth daughter of *Kardama Prajapati*, son of Creator Brahma. Vishnu Purana and Shiva Purana refer to this marriage ritual. In Shiva Purana the derivation for the name Arundhati is given in the following couple of shlokas. It says she is so called because she never does anything which is not concordant with *dharma*. The verb 'rudh' means to resist or desist. The word Arundhati comes from this root word:

arundhatIti tasyAstu nAma cakre mahAmuniH /
Shishyaih parivRtastatra mahAmodam-avapa ha //
na ruNadhi yato dharma sA kasmad-api kAraNAt /
atastriloke viditaM nama samprApa tat-svayaM //

History for the modern mind is what is available through archeological research and due to the fashions set by the western traditions, any research of ancient literature that points to hoary periods several millenia before the common historical era, is looked at with disbelief and therefore not pursued to its logical conclusion. The chronology offered by the *purANas* and the scientific concepts of chronology of events do clash with each other. In order to sort this out a more open-ended research which is prepared to look into the *purANas* and *sthala-purANas* (i.e. the literature that abounds in each pilgrimage centre about that place) as history must be undertaken. It is necessary to stop falling back on the 19^{th} century European viewpoint as if the last words have been said on the ancient scriptures of India. The word *purA*, in Sanskrit means 'past'. What is past is history. The *purANas* are history. Their difference from school books of history is in the fact the *purANas* have the single objective of talking only about those events and lives of the past which ennoble you and enable you to a better man. Since history always repeats itself, the purpose of history should be to learn the lessons of history and do better in the future. The *purANa* makes this its major objective and to that end it perhaps plays on your imagination. But instead of looking at the *purANas* as history we have tended to relegate it to the dustbin by branding it all as nonsensical fiction!

One List of the *PurANA*s:

Brahma-vaivarta-, MArkaNDeya-, Matsya-, Padma-, GaruDa-, VAmana-, Vishnu-, VAyu-, KUrma-, Linga-, Brahma-, agni-, Bhavishyat-, VarAha-, skanda-, NArada-, BhAgavata- and BrahmANDa-PurANA.

The corresponding list of the upa-*PurANA*s:

> *sanat-kumAra-, narasimha-, Shiva-Dharma-, nandi-, durvAsa-, kapila-, MAnava-, aunasa-, VaruNa-, devi-, MAheSvara-, SAmba-, Saura-, parASara-, MArIca-, Shiva-, devI-bhAgavata- and BRhan-nAradIya-PurANA.*

Question: Don't the different PurANAs deify different deities and does this not mean that in Hinduism there is a plethora of Gods and Goddesses with a confusing hierarchy?

See the Section on Shankara's Message of One-ness, in the Chapter 'The Guru'. But, before trying to answer the question, let us try to see the legitmacy of the question. The entire mythological set-up embedded in the multitude of Puranas and upa-puranas, if taken at their story-value without any feeling for the under-current of one Godhead, does create chaos in our intellectual understanding.

The Goddess Saraswati (of Learning) and Lord Shiva (of the Trinity) both emanated from Mahalakshmi, one of the three manifestations of the original Mother Goddess. They two represent the first and fourth facets of the six great qualities of Godhead: '*jnAna-aiSwarya-shakti-bala-vIrya-tejaH*' (meaning, wisdom or enlightenment, wealth, power, strength, potence and brilliance). The Goddess Lakshmi of wealth and Lord BrahmA the Creator both emanated from Maha-Kali, the other manifestation of Mother Goddess. They represent respectively the facets of wealth and potence – the second and fifth of the above six facets. The remaining Lord of the Trinity, Vishnu and the remaining Goddess

of the Trinity, namely, Parvati both emanated from Maha-Saraswati -- so they are brother and sister (as tradition knows it almost as a fiat) – the third part of the manifestation of the Mother Goddess and represent the facets, brilliance and power. These details are in Devi-MahAtmyaM, (one of the upa-puranas). The pairings mentioned here are built into the age-old traditional beliefs and practices, namely, Saraswati and Siva both stand for *jnAna (*knowledge), Lakshmi and BrahmA both have the lotus symbol, and, finally, Lord Vishnu and Goddess Durga (=Parvati) are both the only deities who have each a whole Bhagavata-purana for themselves.

In the SkAnda-purana, it is said that Lord Subrahmanya (see the section on Subrahmanya in Chapter 1) possesses all the six qualities of Godhead, that is in fact what is indicated by His six faces and so He is the supreme Godhead. In the *ViSishTAdvaita* tradition, the transcendental ultimate Godhead is *VAsu-deva – Para-VAsu-deva,* as he is referred to – who has all the six qualities of Knowledge, Wealth, Power, Strength, Potence and Brilliance. For purposes of the management of the universe, he has three lower forms, which are: *SankarshaNa* (for the functions of dissolution or destruction), *Pradyumna* (for the purpose of creation), and *Aniruddha* (for the purpose of preservation nd maintenance). These correspond to the Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati of the Devi-Mahatmya narration. These three possess the pairs of qualities, in order: knowledge and strength, wealth and potence, power and brilliance. We also know the fundamental theological assumption of the pairing of the male Trinity and the female Trinity as the three divine couples: BrahmA-Saraswati, Vishnu-Lakshmi, and Shiva-Parvati. Also we are told that Brahma emanated from Maha-Vishnu's navel. So the latter is the father of the Creator and Lakshmi is the mother. These details are in Vishnu-Purana.

Now try to figure out the various relationships among the different gods and goddesses and arrange them in any kind of hierarchy, either relational, or with respect to qualities or in terms of their functions. In fact what we have listed above is a very atomic part of the mythology that is current, not just in isolated parts of Hindu literature but as the warp and woof of the very fabric of Hinduism, its religion, philosophy, mythology, folklore, culture and temple traditions. When this is the case, what authority do we have to take all these literally and talk about them in terms of our worldly language, imagery and relationships? The only explanation is the one that comes from the concept that there is only one Godhead, that God cannot be delimited by any single name or form nor can He or She be thought of in terms of our anthropomorphic linkages of depen dence and marriages and man-woman-axes of community life. The Vedas cry hoarse in telling us not to attempt any such worldly ways of looking at these divine concepts.

Among the eighteen puranas of Vyasa there are some which glorify Vishnu and His manifestations and there are some others which glorify Shiva or allied divinities. Within the context of each purana that Divinity which is glorified is not only just glorified but talked about as the highest Transcendental Supreme; not only that, the other Divinities, without exception are said to come in person and praise this Lord of that Purana.One can never understand these unless one subscribes to the theory that there is only one Godhead and each manifestation or presentation of that Godhead for the period of that contextis to

be considered Supreme. Without this explanation one would only be spending all one's lifetime trying to find out the impossible rationale out of the apparent chaos!

Saraswati and Lakshmi

Before we close this analysis, it is necessary to refer to another one of the myths that has all along been very much current among the followers of the Hindu faith. It is about Saraswati the Goddess of Learning and Lakshmi the Goddess of Wealth. There is an unsupported folklore and grandmother tradition that Saraswati and Lakshmi will not co-exist and will not get along together since they are 'daughter-in-law' and 'mother-in-law'! And so goes the folklore – Money and Learning do not go together! That the opposite is in fact the truth can be concluded from modern society in the civilised world of the engineering, medical, technological and management professions. Saraswati and Lakshmi not only can coexist but will thrive only together!

In this connection it is interesting to note that it is Macaulay's English-based educational system that is one of the contributors to such misconceptions. It is an ancient tradition in India that on the Vijayadasami day (the day that follows the nine days of Navaratri, the last day of which is called the Saraswati Puja day in South India) children are formally and ceremoniously inducted into education or schooling by starting the teaching of the alphabet of the mother-tongue and of Sanskrit. But after Macaulay inducted the Indian people into the English-based education, what happens on the Vijayadasami day is that the children are put to schooling in English on that day and over the succeeding decades Sanskrit and the mother-tongue receded into the background. Furthermore India identifies Saraswati with this English based education. But it is this education which was inconsistent with the prospering of Lakshmi the Goddess of Wealth; for the original intention of Macaulay was only to train Indians into becoming clerks in the British Empire.

On the other hand if we can identify Saraswati with the Pure Scientific spirit that is imbedded in the Vedas and Vedanta, and identify Lakshmi with the applied science with all the Vedangas which comprise many of the modern areas of professional education (and now we may include the I.T. area also in it), then that combination will give us a better integrated education that we have been missing for almost two centuries in the Macaulay system.

One example should suffice.

In the seventh section of the *sUrya-namaskAra-praSna* (=Sun-worship chapter) (Aranyaka, First chapter called Aruna prashnam) of the Yajur Veda, there are some revealing insights about the Sun. In fact modern solar energy studies must include a research into this portion of this chapter. First it names seven suns! Does it mean that these are the seven colours of the solar spectrum? It does not say so. But throughout this chapter which is itself a treatise on the Sun, and throughout the entire body of scriptures, whenever the Sun-God is mentioned the number seven goes along with it either in the form of seven horses in His chariot or these seven Suns. The seven Suns are named:

aaroga, braaja, paThara, patanga, svarNara, jyotiSImaan, vibhaasa. 'These heat the entire space', goes the text, 'in such a way that no damage is done but they enrich everything with the downpour of the strength-giving rain', etc.

Commentators of the modern kind usually brush these aside by saying that perhaps these represent the seven colours of the solar spectrum and the matter stays there as if there is nothing more to it!

But then the scripture goes on to say -- and here comes the surprise : 'There is an eighth Sun, *kaSyapa*, by name. He never leaves the *mahaa-meru*' cf.

'*kaSyapo'shTamah; sa mahaa-merum na jahaati*'

Then the mantra goes on: 'Oh *Kasyapa*, By the skill that you have in enriching the power of our senses, in the life-giving dalliant rays of yours which bestow nutrition on us, by that skill -- in which the seven Suns are linked to You -- may we be blessed to be in the highest peak of our efficiency'

Why seven? Then the text goes on to mention the various speculations about what it has itself just declared. 'Some say', the text goes on,'these seven suns are the vital airs that dwell in the face; others say that they are the five senses of perception, plus the mind and the intellect.' Incidentally the seven points of entry into the body which are in the face -- namely the two eyes, the two ears, the two nostrils and the mouth -- are the holes which allow the seven *adhyaatma-praaNas*, that is, the vital airs classified as pertaining to the soul within. The five elemental fundamentals -- earth, water, fire, air and space -- together with the two principles called *mahat* and *ahamkaara*, are the seven *adhibhautika praaNas*, that is, the vital airs belonging to the physical plane. The seven Suns, named above, are the *adhi-daivata-praaNas*, that is, the vital airs pertaining to the celestial plane.

‘There is an eighth Sun; its name is *KaSyapa*. He never leaves the mahAmeru. Even Pancakarna, son of Vatsa and Saptakarna, son of Plaksha who have seen all the seven Suns could not go and see the eighth Sun . KaSyapa is so named because He is *PaSyaka* – the one who sees everything in all its subtlety …’

Then comes the passage narrating the claims of great sages about their experience of the seven Suns and the eighth Sun. Two sages by name *panca-karNa*, son of *vatsa;* and *sapta-karna*, son of *plaksha* claim to have seen the seven Suns; but, say the two, they have not been able to go to the *mahaa-meru* and see the eighth Sun. But everybody strongly recommends, says the text, that man should strive to go to the *mahaa-meru* and see that One-ness of Divinity, called *kaSyapa*. It becomes clear that they are referring to the Supreme Reality here which is the substratum of all the seven Suns. '*tasya bhaasaa sarvam idam vibhati*, say the scriptures in another place, referring thereby to the Transcendental Absolute. So these seven Suns themselves derive their strength and dalliance from the eighth Sun, namely *kaSyapa*. The seven Suns originated from *kaSyapa*, says the text: *kaSyapaad-uditaas-sUryaah* The very name *kaSyapa* is extolled

and its meaning derived by going into its etymology. *kaSyapah paSyako bhavati* is a statement occurring in the eighth section of the same chapter. It means *kaSyapa* is the One that Sees -- meaning, He sees rightly. The next sentence in the text explains this: *yat sarvam pari-pazyati-iti saukshmyaat* meaning, 'because it sees everything in all its subtlety'. The root word for seeing is *driS* . When conjugated, this becomes *paSyati* . There is another esoteric significance here. The word *kaSyapa* has three syllables: *ka* , *Sya* , and *pa* - in that order. Reverse the order of these three syllables. We get *pa* , *Sya* , and *ka* . They make up, in that order, the word *paSyaka* - which means, One Who Sees. That is why, *kaSyapah paSyako bhavati* ! bhavati means ' becomes'. *kaSyapa* happens to be *paSyaka* .

The existence of this eighth Sun in the form of the Ultimate Supreme (Who sees, as things are to be seen) is given only in the scriptures and one wonders whether this could have implications for the understanding of what Solar Energy really is.

It goes on like this. What is this eigth Sun? What is its implication to our sensory scientific knowledge? Who will do research on this? Who can? Should India wait until some foreign Professor from Cambridge or Harvard or Stanford puts his or her mind to it and writes a monograph? Are not Indian scholars the best persons to study them? Such a study cannot be done by a person who cares only for occidental Science or by a person who is ignorant of occidental science. The Saraswati of the East, which represents Pure Science, and Lakshmi of the West which revels in Applied Science should have to come together!

Puranic chronologies

Question: You have earlier mentioned that Kaliyuga started in 3102 B.C.E. And your authority seems to be only what has been passed on from generation to generation. But historians have a different perception of these Puranic chronologies. How do you reconcile the mystical chronology associated with mythological figures such as Rama, and Krishna, advocated by orthodox Hindu religion on one side and questioned by scientific concepts of chronology of events on the other side?

Historians will keep changing their perception when more and more evidence falls into their hands. This is a dynamic process. But the past is a single static fact. In order to understand it right we have to do more research. Regarding these yuga chronologies and what the Puranas talk about some research has been made by experts using the astronomical events mentioned in them. The results of such research differ widely among the experts themselves. In trying to do this research about dating the events of the distant past – like the Date of Shankara, or the Date of the Mahabharata War, for example – in addition to relying on all the archeological and historical evidence collected in the scientific way, one should also be able to do literary search and research into the innumerable mythological literature, temple *sthala-puranas* and so on, keeping an open mind. Until this kind of research is carried out and leads to specific results, we have no right to answer the question categorically.

Both in its historical past and in the distant past which the Puranas describe, there have been hundreds of celebrated devotees who have left us not only their lives as their message but in many cases works of unequalled grandeur in terms of devotional literature cast into long poems of praise of the divine. If Hinduism has survived several millenia of ups and downs of civilisation, wars between rulers and dictators, conquests of lands and empires and ravages of man and nature, it is because of these works of immense benefit to the spirituality inherent in the religion of Hinduism irrespective of its ritualistic exterior. Throughout the length and breadth of India there are temples, whose buildings may be historically datable, but the very idol or icon of the deity or the lingam installed therein, if not the innermost *sanctum sanctorum* of these temples, have a mythological (=trans-historical) origin, which go far beyond anything that is known to recorded history. Almost every temple, particularly the southern regions of India, has a '*sthala purana*' which itself is preceded by an oral tradition of several centuries. A *sthala purana* is the mythological history of a temple deity and flourishes in the locale of that shrine as its collective recorded tradition. There are probably a thousand of them even in one state like Tamilnadu. They connect the deity of the temple with mythological incidents that are replete in the Puranas. The historical existence itself of the authors of some of these has still to be researched. Even the historically known authors of some of these puranas are not themselves their originators; they are only poets and scholars who drew inspiration from earlier material. But what is amazing is the impression that one gathers from these *sthala-puranas* that the union of them all does not seem to have contradictions in their essential narration, though there are, surely, contradictions in the details of names and chronology. It is also clear that they were all originated by different persons at different times, probably in different eras. Truth is stranger than fiction. Apparently our rational minds have difficulty in accepting this.

If you want to explain the viriety of miracles recorded in these *sthala puranas*, if you want to really understand the unity underlying this vast amount of information imbedded in them, and if you want to dive through the lessons for spirituality that lie scattered, like gems under the bed of the ocean , in all of these works of devotion, you cannot but give these *sthala puranas* some credence in terms of historical value. It is unbelievable that mere stone-idols of deities and bronze-images of gods motivated the great kings and rulers of the past to build such gigantic structures for these temple-gods, spending their time and money and using all their wealth of men and material. Every builder of such temples would tell you miraculous stories of how the Almighty Itself prompted him, gave the ideation, provided the wherewithal, and had the 'temple' built for itself!

5. Aagama

The Aagamas are prayers and rituals, specially those connected with construction of temples and worship of idols. They appeal to the heart and thereby have influenced successive generations of Hindu families. The worship protocol for each Devata is the main objective of Agama. The main branches of such protocol, namely, *Shaiva*, *Vaishnava-PancharAtra*, *Vaishnava-VaikhAnasa* and *ShAkta*, arose from the Agama treatises. Devotees of the Lord place their ultimate faith in one of the many manifestations of the Absolute. It is these vast Agama-ShAtras which prescribe the

precise manner in which such worship may and should be done. Each Agama begins with the philosophical principles which govern that particular worship. Another part of it prescribes necessary qualifications and stipulations. And another part enunciates the rules and regulations for the construction of temples for that particular deity and a daily worship routine in those temples.

Another important part of the Agamas deals with the making of icons of deities for worship, both in the temples and at homes. The precision with which these details of the icons are given in Agama ShAstras is unbeatable. Whatever part of India you may go to, though you may see different types of faces of the deities, which may correspond to the type of people in the geographical environment, the other details about proportions and postures that the Agamas prescribe for the icons will be uniform throughout the Hindu temple traditions.

The Aagamas have a further significance. They contain a lot of prayers and stotrams on the various Gods and Goddesses and these have caught the permanent attention of all strata of the populace over the centuries.

6. DarSana

The six darSanas – *SAnkhya, Yoga, NyAya, VaiSeshika, PUrva-MImAmsa, Uttara-MimAmsa* -- are intellectual schools of thought which explain the essential content of the Vedas by meticulous reasoning. The Vedas provide the verbal testimony (*shabda-pramANa*). They are important because they embody for us the truths discovered by sages and saints in their personal experience, truths which can be tested by us if we undergo the discipline necessary therefor. Discovery and experience of truths is followed (and not preceded) by systematic formulation of the truths. This formulation is what the *DarSanas* are after. Each *darSana* (= facet or viewpoint) owes its origin to a collection of aphorisms (= *sUtras*) . It emphasizes a certain aspect of the vedas as its dominant theme. The *yoga-darSana* makes the theme of mystic experimentation the dominant factor. The *pUrva-mImAmsa darSana* emphasizes the *karma kANDa* of the vedas as the dominant theme and purpose of life.

At different times in the past history of India, different *darSanas* have held their sway. Contemporary opinion holds that it is the *Vedanta-darSana* of Badarayana (identified with Vyasa by orthodox opinion) that is suited to the modern age of scientific enquiry. Though there are so many scriptures the Vedanta school relies heavily on three only:

The Upanishads (from the Shruti); The Bhagavad-gItA (from the smRti); The Brahma-sUtras (Vedanta-darSana)

These three are collectively known as the ***prasthAna-traya***. Major religious teachers have written elaborate commentaries on these. The three schools of Vedanta with which the three major Masters -- Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa -- are identified, have been sustained to this day by successive generations of *AcAryas* (Masters) who have held the torch of that school of thought and have contributed enormously to the propagation of

that thought. As a result of the influence of this succession of AcAryas, the Vedanta-*darSana* has become so much a part of scholarly Hinduism that the word Vedanta itself has come to mean 'philosophy' in Indian languages. The significance of Vedanta-darSana arises from the wealth of thoughts that go back to the Upanishads. R.C. Zaehner in his introduction to the “Hindu Scriptures” sums up the thoughts of the Upanishads beautifully in one sentence: ‘The Upanishads investigate the nature of reality and their main conclusion is that in both the universe at large and in the individual human being there is a ground of pure Being which is impervious to change’.

All the schools of Vedanta-darSana agree that all problems of life have to be looked at from the spiritual angle holistically. The fact that, in Hinduism, spirituality enters the picture even in secular questions and matters, is one of the most remarkable, but at the same time not well understood, features of Hinduism. Hinduism believes that man’s quest for ultimate happiness does not stop with the the pursuit of material prosperity (*artha*), sensual satisfaction (*kAma*) and perfection in moral and social behaviour (*dharma*). It believes that there is a fourth objective which has to be pursued. Beyond a moral life in which you do good to society and to your brethren, there is also a life on the mental and emotional plane and also a life on the spiritual and mystic plane. It talks of inner strength and happiness which is ultimate. In fact , to be a perfect do-gooder to society the inner strength has to come from something beyond the three goals of life. So Hinduism orients even the pursuit of your daily life and your moral and social life in such a way that when the time comes to seek beyond, either in this life or in a later one, your habits and *vAsanAs* will not come in the way.

The Ultimate goal being the release from the cycle of births and deaths, anything that brings us back to this ephmeral world of action and reaction is not the suprememost *dharma*. The theme therefore in all scriptural injunctions is: **Time is running, life may end at any time, therefore do your *dharma* immediately.**

A shloka of Bhartrhari (Vairagya-shatakaM: 43) is relevant here:

aadityasya gatAgataiH aharahaH samkShIyate jIvitaM
vyApArair-bahu-kArya-bhAra-gurubhiH kAlo'pi na jn~Ayate /
dRRiShTvA janma-jarA-vipatti-maraNaM trAsashcha notpadyate
pItvA moha-mayIM pramAda-madirAM unmatta-bhUtaM jagat //

Meaning: The Sun rises and sets. Day passes into night and night into day. But what is really happening is they are taking away our lives. But we are not even aware of the passage of time. Such is our deep involvement in the weight of our businesses.We do not get a jolt of fear even after watching, almost daily, the inescapable sequence of birth, old age, adversity, misfortune, disaster, failure and final death. We are just overdrunk with the delusion of attachment which is our own making.

It is therefore necessary to work for the spiritual elevation well before the body gets weak and unhealthy, well before old age overtakes us, well before the limbs lose their power, well before one’s life is exhausted. To wait and postpone spiritual activity until old age

is like starting to dig a well for water when the house has already begun burning. Cf. (BhartRhari: Vairagya-shatakaM, #75):

yAvat svastam-idam sharIram arujaM yAvaj-jarA dUrataH
yAvac-cendriya-shaktir-apratihatA yAvat-kShayo nAyuShaH /
Atma-shreyasi tAvadeva viduShA kAryaH prayatno mahAn
saMdIpte bhavane tu kUpa-khananaM pratyudyamaH kIdRRishaH //

This issue of 'Death on the Wings' is always in the background and that is the motivation to spiritualise a Hindu's entire approach to life, at all times.

One classical instance where this has been very forcefully brought out is Rama's sermon to Bharata (in V.R.) when the latter pleads with Rama in the forest to come back to Ayodhya and take back the throne that he had forsaken for the sake of the father's word. The circumstances have never been more dramatic. Instead of simply declaring that Bharata cannot be obliged, since Rama has already decided to go by his father's command, whatever the consequences may be, Rama chose to make the issue of 'death on the wings' as the motivation to spiritualise the whole discussion. 'What is ultimate?', asks Rama. Is it the temporary benefit to the ruler and the ruled of Ayodhya or is it the more fundamental values of each man's evolution towards the Ultimate Supreme? Does the individual self have a freedom to argue from a point of view other than that of the Infinite Self embedded in it?

Why are you grieving, says Rama to Bharata, over inessential things – while your greatest obligation in life, namely, to be in concordance with the Supreme Self, is the summum bonum of all dharmas?

CHAPTER 4: SUNDARA-KANDA TRIAD – VALMIKI, KAMBAN & TULSI

(Note: For the purpose of this chapter, we recall the three abbreviations:
V.R. : Valmiki Ramayana (in Sanskrit);
K.R.: Kamba-Ramayanam (in Tamil);
T.R. : Tulsi's Ram-carita-mAnas (in Hindi))

There is nothing in the whole world of literature, religious or secular, to beat the quantum of influence and quality of impact left by *VAlmIki* and *VyAsa* on succeeding generations of people in five successive millenia. They have left their mark on the largest number of people for the longest period of time in the history of civilisation. *VAlmIki*'s RAmAyana particularly, where the story is more simplistic than that of the MahA-bhArata of *VyAsa*, is a scriptural fantasy.

> In the unfortunate circumstance of the reader not knowing the story of Ramayana or the Mahabharata or both, he might want to read the very short one-paragraph versions of the two stories given in the Section on *ItihAsa*, in Chapter 3.

For that very reason, its story has been retold by later poets, with all the excitement and dramatics of poetry, the right vehicle for emotions beautifully remembered in extreme tranquility. In the great lineage of poets who dwelt on *VAlmIki*'s theme of the Ramayana, Kamban (12^{th} century) in Tamil and Tulsi (16^{th} century) in Hindi (actually, it is awadhi) are foremost. To compare and contrast the three giants *VAlmIki*, Kamban and Tulsi, may well be the work of a lifetime. We shall, in this chapter, restrict ourselves to a modest scrutiny of the handling of the *sundara-kANDa* by the three poets. *Sundara-kANDa,* which is the fifth KANDa in the chronological narration of the story, is that part of the Ramayana where the great devotee and disciple Hanuman, goes to Lanka in search of Sita, succeeds in his classic adventure of marathon proportions, and brings back valuable information about her and of the enemies who are keeping her captive, so that Rama with the monkey army can challenge them and win her back. The scene of the whole story is Lanka, (modern Sri Lanka) the abode of the then-living Rakshasas.

Before we proceed to the *sundara-kANDa*, we may say a few words distinguishing in general, via a macro-perception, these three great epics in the three languages, Sanskrit, Tamil and Hindi. *VAlmIki* raises man Rama to Lord-God by a vivid portrayal of his ideal behaviour and superlative valour while Kamban and Tulsi portray Rama as God Himself descended on Earth in the manner of the concept of *avatAra*. In *VAlmIki* the main '*rasa*' (= flavour) is pathos. One almost gets into tears while reading the ancient lines of *VAlmIki*. In Kamban's work it is poetry that dominates devotion, while in Tulsi it is the

other way. *VAlmIki* portrays everything as one sees it as it happens, true to the blessing of the Creator Brahma;

na te vAganRtA kAvye kAcidatra bhavishyati/(V.R. 1-2-35)
No narration of yours will be false**.**

Kamban is full of micro-dramatic details and descriptions as in a commentator's description of a cricket match or an Independence Day Parade.

Tulsi waxes eloquent when it is a question of devotion to Rama and he throws his own comments as would, a commentator on the media. For instance he has ten lines of glorified description of the fortified city of Lanka, the elephants, horses and mules, groves and orchards and myriads of soldiers and warriors and champions. And then he says (T.R.:V – 1 – 3):

Ehi lAgi tulsIdAs in-hi kI kathA kacchu ek hai kahI /
raghuvIR sar tIrath sarIr hi tyAg gati paihahi sahI//
Tulsidas has briefly told their story only because
they will drop their bodies at the sanctuary of
Sri Rama's arrows and thereby attain the supreme state.

Tulsi turns everything into devotion of the supreme Rama. But both the later poets, Tulsi and Kamban, pay their homage to *VAlmIki*, each in his own inimitable way, by reminding us, very often, of the very words of *VAlmIki*, either directly or indirectly.

We shall see all this in the *sundara-kANDa* contrast, which is legitimately a good sample of these macro-distinctions among the three giant-poets. The story moves very fast in Tulsi's *sundar-kAND*. Only 200 verses or so in Tulsi cover the entire *sundara-kANDa* of *VAlmIki* or Kamban. This is so inspite of the fact that Tulsi covers a larger ground. Almost half of the *sundar-kAND* of Tulsi is taken by the episodes of Vibhishana's surrender and the lying down of the Lord on a bed of kusa-grass to win over the Lord of the Ocean – these episodes being part of the next *kANDa*, namely *yuddha-kANDa*, in both Valmiki and Kamban. And with all this, the 200 verses (around 4 percent. of his whole Ram Charita-manas) in Tulsi cover the entire Sundara Kanda whereas Valmiki devotes 3031 *shloka*s (more than 12 percent. of the whole Ramayana) divided into 68 sargas (chapters) to cover only the story of Hanuman's journey, search, discovery, interaction and return. Neither Valmiki nor Kamban deal with Vibhishana's surrender in their Sundara Kandas. Kamban devotes 1298 stanzas (about 12 percent. of his whole Ramayanam) for his Sundarakandam.

Very often do we see that the later poets elaborate what was just touched upon or hinted at by the original author. Hanuman meets LankinI the ogre-angel for the city of Lanka as soon as he lands in Lanka and attempts to enter the fortified city. *VAlmIki* just says that she was 'fiendish-looking' (= *vikRtAnana-darSanA*: 5-3-21). Kamban devotes seven verses to describe how fiendish she was. Tulsi does not elaborate the duel between Hanuman and Lankini but just mentions the bare outline. Nor does he elaborate the search for Sita. He makes Hanuman meet Vibhishana and learn where she is imprisoned. This is a major difference between Tulsi on the one side and Kamban and *VAlmIki* on the

other side. The scene is not there in the latter two. So in their cases, the search has to be elaborate and also naturally carries a lot of suspense and excitement to the reader. It thereby gives enough opportunities to the poets for their poetry and imagery.

Particularly Kamban excels in descriptions, imageries, similies, metaphors, analogies and microdetails such as statistics.

In Valmiki the main rasa is pathos. We only pity Ravana. In Tulsi the main rasa is bhakti, devotion. His Ravana at times is disgusting. He kicks Vibhishana; he kneels and cringes before Sita.

Lines such as

> 'There, not even one woman had been obtained forcefully by the strong Ravana, except for that daughter of Janaka, Sita. Every other woman had been obtained by her good character alone and there was no woman who had desire in another man, and there also was none with another in her life'.

na tatra kAScit pramadAH prasahya vIryopapannena guNena labdhAH /
na cAnya-kAmApi na cAnya-pUrvA vinA varArhAM janakAtmajAm tAM//
(V.R. V-9-71)

are not there either in Kamban or Tulsi. The above *shloka* occurs in the description of women in Ravana's harem where Hanuman was searching while they were all asleep. The above *shloka* follows Valmiki's statement: All those women had been stolen by Ravana with a desire for war, some together with heat of youth obtained Ravana being desired by god of love. (*Shloka* #70).

Hanuman's search for Sita in Ravana's harem reveals Hanuman's spotless character. And it also gives us an opportunity to see Valmiki's portrayal of the monkeyish trace in Hanuman. He sees Mandodari, Ravana's wife sleeping. Three beautiful epithets are used (V.R. V–10– 51,52) to describe Mandodari: '*cAru-rUpiNI*' (beautiful figure), '*bhUshanais-suvibhUshitAM*' (charmingly decorated by jewellery), and '*vibhUshayantIm iva ca svashriyA bhavanottamaM*' (decorating the whole hall by the richness of her own radiance). Seeing this lady, Hanuman for a moment thinks it is Sita. And he jumps in joy!

AsphoTayAmAsa cuchumba pucchaM nananda cikrIDa jagau jagAma/
stambhAn-arohan-nipapaAta bhUmau nidarshayan svAM prakRtiM kapInAM //
He clapped his hands, clasped his arms, kissed his tail,
was delighted, was playful, sang, paced showing his simian nature,
climbed pillars and fell down on the floor.

This depiction of Hanuman's monkeyish reaction is enjoyable; so Kamban does not touch it! But Kamban is too good a poet to miss the opportunity of such expressions. So he uses it when Hanuman actually sees Sita in the Ashoka-vana:

Adinan pADinan ANDum INDum pAyndu
Odinan ulAvinan uvakait-tEn uNDAn (K.R.V – 393)

Drunk to the brim with the honey of happiness,
he danced, he sang, he jumped hither and thither, ran and paced.

Tulsi does not elaborate Hanuman's feelings when he saw Sita; he simply says: "He mentally bowed to Her as soon as he saw Her" (T.R. V – 7 – 4):

Dekhi man hi mahu kInhi prNAmA /

Coming back to Valmiki, the sudden delight of Hanuman on seeing Mandodari and thinking of her as Sita soon vanished; thought Hanuman, (continues Valmiki):

> This cannot be Sita. That Sita is not suitable to sleep separated from Rama, will not eat, will not decorate also, not suited to drink a beverage, to reach another man even though if he were Indra because there is indeed no one equaling Rama even among gods. This must be another woman.

na RameNa viyuktA sA svaptum-arhati bhAminI /
na bhOktum nApyalamkartuM na pAnam-upasevituM //
nAnyaM naram-upasthAtuM surANAmapi ceSvaraM //
na hi rAma samaH kaScit vidyate tridaSeshvapi /
anyeyamiti niScitya bhUyas-tatra cacAra saH // (V.R. V – 11-2,3)

The thoughts of Hanuman on not seeing Sita anywhere in Lanka, before he decided to search in the Ashoka grove are excellent in Valmiki. Also, a little before that, having seen the ladies of Ravanas harem in their own bedrooms in compromising postures – which both Valmiki and Kamban describe rather uncompromisingly, with Kamban going into microdetails – Hanuman first censures himself, then realises that his mind has not wavered at all, due to the Lord's Grace. Here are some beautiful lines from Valmiki (V.R. V – 11 – 37 to 43):

Para-dArAvarodhasya prasuptasya nirIkshaNaM /
idaM khalu mamAtyarthaM dharma-lopaM karishyati //
na hi me paradArANAM dRshTir-vishaya-vartinI /
na tu me manasA kimcit vaikRtyam-upapadyate//
mano hi hetus-sarveshAM indriyANAm pravartane /
shubhA-shubhAsu avasthAsu tacca me suvyavasthitaM //
striyo hi strIshu dRSyante sadA samparimArgaNe /
na shakyaM pramadA nashTA mRgIshu parimArgituM //

> My seeing the sleeping house of other people's wives will do a great default to dharma. My sight is indeed not in the matter of other wives here; to my mind there indeed was not even a little disturbance. Among auspicious or inauspicious states in the behavior of all senses mind is the reason. That mind of mine is very steady. During search for women they can always be seen only among other women. A woman missing is not possible to be searched among female deer.

These lines are some of Valmiki's excellences. Now inspite of the consoling words to himself about his mind being steady, the fact that after all this search Sita has not been seen depresses Hanuman (V – 12 – 1 to 9). Then he analyses the situation with great

self-reliance and faith in his hero Rama. Again there is no parallel of these lines anywhere else:

anirvedaH shriyo mUlaM anirvedaH paraM sukhaM /
anirvedo hi satataM sarvArthesu pravartakaH//
karoti sakalaM jantoH karma yacca karoti saH/
tasmAd-anirvedakaraM yatnaM cEshTe'ham-uttamaM//
adRshTAmSca viceshyAmi deshAn rAvaNa-pAlitAn /
(V.R. V – 12 – 10, 11)

Non-depression is the basis of all development. Absence of despondency is the greatest comfort. Self reliance always is indeed the promoter in all matters. Whatever action a human does that action of man is made to be successful by non-depression. Therefore I will perform a best effort that is devoid of depression. I will now search all those regions ruled by Ravana but not yet seen.

So again he continues his search. But again after some more search he gets a depressing feeling once more.

The description of the search from house to house by Hanuman gets an elaborate dramatisation in Kamban's portrayal. Mansions, porticos, palaces, dance-halls, temples, smaller houses, music platforms, auditoria for debates -- every nook and corner was covered by Hanuman. In describing this Kamban says that Hanuman was capable of contracting himself or enlarging himself so as to enter any place and get out from anywhere (K.R. V – 228). Kamban describes Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Indrajit's mansions very elaborately, whereas Valmiki gives only a list of names whose houses were searched by Hanuman. Of course Tulsi does not elaborate the search. He makes Hanuman meet Vibhishana and learn the truth.

The depression of Hanuman that Valmiki depicts is also handled by Kamban in his own inimitable style. 'Maybe Ravana killed that chaste lady and did the horrendous act of eating her up! Maybe he has kept her captive in some inaccessible cave! My Lord Rama is thinking I will come back after seeing and talking to her! My boss Sugriva is thinking I will come back bringing her. How can I go back and tell them that I have failed?'. (K.R. V -320, 321). So goes Hanuman.

In Tulsi's narration all this drama is absent because Hanuman meets Vibhishana during his night-search and gets the information that Sita is held captive in the Ashoka forest nearby.

We shall go back to Valmiki. After one of the bouts of depression and a reassuring self-analysis, Hanuman spots the Ashoka forest and realises he has not searched there. Ha! That is the place I have to search now, says Hanuman and mentally thanks (with great hope and faith) all the gods that he knows as well as his own favourites, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana. (cf. *namo'stu rAmAya salakshmaNAya* ….. V.R. V – 13 – 59). Consequently this *shloka* gets importance and all Ramayana expositors consider this as a prayer to Rama and other gods. They invariably include this in their preliminary recitals before their expositions.

The scenes in the beautiful Ashoka grove where Hanuman spots Sita are the most important ones in Sundara Kanda. The three poets excel one another with their depictions here, each with his own unique stamp of literary excellence.

Valmiki describes it. Hanuman, seated on the Simsupa tree sees an emaciated woman seated among Rakshasis, 'wearing a soiled garment, ('*malina-samvItAM*' V-15-18) surrounded by rakshasa women, emaciated due to fasting, looking miserable, sighing again and again, like the pure crescent moon at the beginning of a bright fortnight.' (V.R. V – 15 – 8). ' like an intellect together with doubts, like a cast away treasure Like shattered faith, like frustrated hope, like success together with obstacles, like an impure mind, like fame that has fallen down by a false scandal' (V – 15 – 31, 32).

Hanuman reasoned: 'The woman I saw whom Ravana was carrying away was of the same description with large sweet eyes, face like the full-moon, the eye-brows like Manmatha's bow, black tresses of hair, coral lips and the narrow waist (V – 15 – 26, 27). I bleieve this lady of golden colour (*kanaka varNAngI* : Shloka 46) must be the same Sita, Janaka's daughter. The sari she is wearing is of the same colour, though faded. (V – 15 – 45). I do not find on her person those ornaments which she had dropped on the Rishyamukha mountain (and picked up by our monkeys). No doubt the existing ornaments are the same which did not drop from her person' (V – 15 – 42).

From the manner of her clothing etc. and from the above arguments, he recognizes her to be Sita, -- even as 'one is able to decipher with difficulty a text which being devoid of clarity of expression has undergone a change of meaning'

AmnAyAnAm ayogena vidyAM prashithilAm iva" (V.R. V – 15 -38).

The 'soiled garment' (*malina-samvItAM*) expression and the shloka 45 of Valmiki ('*idam cira-gRhItatvAt*' :) get an elaboration in a whole stanza in Kamban that is nothing but beautiful: (Tamil) (K.R. V – 336)

tuppinAl ceytha kaiyoDu kAl peRRa tuLi manju
oppinAn tanai ninaithoRum neDungkaNkaL ukutta
appinAl nanaindu aruntuyir eyirppuDai yAkkai
veppinAl pularndu oru nilai uRAtha men tuhilAL

Rama's profile compares with the black cloud that has arms and legs made of pearl. Thinking of him Sita's longish eyes overflow with tears that wet her fine clothing. But the wetness dries up by the heat generated by the unbearable sorrow and the consequent heavy breathing. Thus her saree alternates between wet and dry and thereby accrues an uncertain quality.

But Kamban really shines most in this part of the narration in his 18 exquisite verses (340 to 357 of K.R.) under the heading '*kollum ninaivugaL*' (Killing Memories) and (Recollections of the Past). While sitting and brooding over her thoughts about Rama, Sita recalls several striking anecdotes of the past. Here is a famous one about Rama's reaction (in truth, the absence of reaction!) to the sudden change in his fortunes by the announcement from within Kaikeyi's inner apartments made on behalf of his own father

– the father, who, just the previous day, made the public announcement of his coronation and scheduled it for the next morning. *(K.R. SundarakanDam: 348) :*

Meyt-tiruppadam mEvu enRa pOdilum ittiruttuRandu Egu enRa pOdilum
cittirattin alarnda sentAmarai ottirukkum mugattinai unnuvAL.
Both when the King proclaimed his ascension to the much coveted Royal throne
and when the Queen ordered him to renounce kingship and go to the forest,
Rama's face showed no change and shone like the fully bloomed lotus in a picture.

The significance here is not just in the poet's imagination of the lotus analogy to Rama's face – which is common in Indian literature – but in the poet's further imagination of the lotus as a fully blossomed one in a picture. A real lotus fully bloomed will not remain in that bloom for long. On the other hand the lotus in a picture will remain in the bloomed state for ever!

Again one more among her recollections!: (*(K.R. SundarakANDam: 351)*

Azha nIrk kangai ambi kaDAviya ezhai vEDanukku embi nin tambi nI
tozhan mangai kozhundi enacconna vAzhi naNpinai unni mayanguvAL.
Rama's acme of friendship finds expression in words uttered to Guhan,
the poor boatman who rowed them across the Ganga:
'My brother is your brother. You are my friend. This Sita is your sister-in-law'.

The words here remind one of an almost similar sounding song (with the same meaning) of Tirumangai Alwar (8th century C.E.) in his 'Tiruvarangam: 5', Song No. 1418 of the Four Thousand prabandhams:

Ezhai Edalan kIzhmagan ennAdu irangi maRRu avaRku in aruL curandu
mAzhai mAn maDa nOkki un tOzhi umbi embi enRu ozhindilai ugandu
tozhan nI enakku ingu ozhi ….

Tulsi transfers all this to Hanuman's mouth when he reports to Rama, on returning to him, in reply to Rama's question on how Sita is sutaining her life.: (T.R. V- 30):

nAm pAharU divas nisi dhyAn tumhAr kapAT /
locan nija pad jantrit jahi prAn kEhi bAT //

Your name keeps watch night and day while Her continued thought of You acts as apair of closed doors. She has Her eyes fastened on Her own feet; Her life thus finds no outlet whereby to escape.

These are excellent lines. Sita's stay in the Ashoka Grove in Lanka is in the style of a *prapanna*, that is, of one who has surrendered to the Lord. These immortal lines of Tulsi must surely have had their inspiration from Valmiki's own lines, which however occur in the scene where Hanuman is watching her from the top of the tree and admiring her divine devotional fidelity to Lord Sri Rama: (V.R. V -16 – 25, 26):

naishA paSyati rAkshasyo nemAn pushpa-phala-drumAn /
ekastha-hRdayA nUnaM rAmam-evA-nupaSyati //

bhartA nAma paraM nAryAH shobanaM bhUshaNAd-api /
eshA hi rahitA tena shobhanArhA na shobhate //

She is not seeing the Rakshasis, neither the flowers, fruits nor trees; with a single heart She is meditating only on Sri Rama - this is sure. Husband is indeed the greatest adornment for a woman greater than jewellery; this Sita though deserving of decoration, is not looking charming without Sri Rama.

Valmiki's words '*naishA paSyati'* are the key words here which prompted Tulsi to write those immortal word-combination of his, '*nAma pAharU*'. Valmiki has already used this concept of Right Vision being that which sees Rama and is seen by Rama; the occasion is in Ayodhya, when the preparations for the coronation are fully on and Rama is walking over to Kaikeyi's apartments on the monumental call from father Dasaratha, which turned the course of events all the way around. The relevant shloka is famous: (V.R. II - 17-14):

yaSca rAmaM na paSyettu yaM ca rAmo na paSyati /
ninditaH sarva-lokeshu svAtmApyenaM vigarhate //
The whole world blamed the one who did not see Rama
and the one who was not seen by Rama.
Such a person would blame himself of it.

This chain of ideas also reminds one of the famous Bhagavad Gita shloka where the Lord says : He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me, to him I do not get lost, nor does he get lost to Me: (B.G. 6 – 30):

Yo mAM paSyati sarvatra sarvam-ca mayi paSyati /
tasyAhaM na praNaSyAmi sa ca mE na praNaSyati //

Kamban naturally waxes eloquent in these scenes. Just one stanza on this. (K.R. V – 403):

darmamE kAttado? Canakan nalvinaik-karumame kAttado? kaRpin kAvalo?
arumaiyE, arumaiyE! yAr idu ARRuvAr? orumaiyE emmanorkku uraikkaRpAlado?

Did Dharma keep vigil over Sita? Or is it the sum total of the good deeds of King Janaka? Is it the vigil of Chastity itself? Wonderful! Who else can protect oneself like this except Sita Devi? This greatness of the Devi cannot be described by words by such ordinary persons as I am.

There are more feathers to Valmiki's cap here. Hanuman's thoughts go on. Hanuman, the eye witness to the present status of this chaste and pure sita Devi, questions himself , sitting on the tree top, as to how Rama happens to live without this Sita who is so devoted to him. "This is She for whose sake Rama tormented in four ways from compassion from pity from grief from love; (thinking that) a woman has disappeared from compassion, depending on him from pity, wife has been lost from grief, a dear one from love." (V -15 – 48, 49) "Although bereft of Her that Lord Rama is doing an impossible task by retaining His body and not being depressed by sorrow." Thinks Hanuman: (V.R. V – 16 – 27) and (V – 15 – 51):

dushkaraM kurute rAmo hIno uad-anayA prabhuH /
dhArayatyAtmano dehaM na dukhenAvasIdati//

The scene now changes. Ravana arrives in a state of mental torment that he has not been able to persuade Sita to even look at him and he continues to torment Sita by pungent words. After Ravana leaves the scene, the next major event is Hanuman's announcement of himself to attract Sita's attention. This is done by the three poets in three different ways. But before we come to that, we shall see how the three poets describe this worst moment of desperation in Sita's earthly existence. Tulsi makes Sita ask for fire from Trijata , but the latter says no fire can had at night; so Sita pleads with the Ashoka tree to supply her with fire and put an end to her agony. Hanuman watches this and the 'moment seems like a whole *kalpa* to Hanuman as he beheld Sita extremely distressed due to Her separation from the Lord' (T.R.V-12):

dEkhi parama virahAkul sItA
sOchhan kapi hi kalpa-sam bItA

and he thought within himself -- *' kapi kari hRday vichAr'* . And he dropped the ring! This is all what Tulsi says. This 'thinking within himself' is the debate that Hanuman has within himself for a whole chapter in Valmiki. Kamban also passes over this '*hRday vichAr*' in one stanza by making Hanuman debate a little before he appears in front of Sita announcing himself. But now let us see how Valmiki handles this scene elaborately. And that is probably the reason why Kamban and Tulsi decided not to elaborate it! In Valmiki Hanuman debates quite a lot and finally decides to narrate Rama's story sitting on the tree itself. This attracts her attention.

Th debate of Hanuman within himself is a beautiful soliloquy going over a whole chapter (Sarga 30 in V.R. Sundara kanda) consisting of 44 shlokas. Here are a few glimpses of this soliloquy:

> "….I should console this Sita. If I don't console her and go my way, she might take away her life and all the efforts taken by all the monkeys would be a wasted effort. And I should console her within this night. There is no doubt that she has decided to take away her life. If Rama asks me 'What did Sita say?' what reply would I give him? …… Without a proper message from her I should not go back. …..If in this small monkey body of mine I go to her and speak in a human voice, she might think I am Ravana in disguise and be totally frightened. But I do have to talk to her in a human voice. But in fright if she raises an alarm then all the Rakshasis would be on me. ….And then the Rakshasa army may be alerted and there might be a fight. … I am not afraid of them … I have come all the way crossing the ocean. … I am confident of overcoming any obstacle from the Rakshasas …. But the meeting with Sita would have been disturbed and would have become impossible … How do I do all this with certainty that everything is correctly done? ('*kaSca nissamshayaM kAryaM kuryAt-prAjnas-sasamshayaM*' V.R. V – 30 – 35). Thus there is great danger in my trying to talk to her. If I don't talk to her also there is danger. How do I do all this without making the crossing of the ocean a wasted effort. How do I talk to her so that she is not afraid of me? Hey, Ram! …' And finally he decided to sing the story of Rama from the beginning in the most gentle way from the tree top itself in a human voice, so that she may hear it, prick her ears and be ready to receive good news. And he decided to show his presence to her at that time.!

And thus he begins:

> 'There was a king Dasaratha by name in the line of the famous Ikshvaku. He was greatly respected …… And he had a beloved gem of a son by name Rama who was most loved by his people because of his dharmic tendencies nd actions…..In order to preserve the truthfulness of the words of his father he proceeded to the forest along with his wife and brother. ….In the forest he was duped by Ravana by a strategy through a fake deer and Sita was abducted by Ravana. ….Rama and Lakshmana went on searching for her, made friends with monkey king Sugriva. …. After killing Sugriva's enemy Vali, Sugriva was made king of the monkey kingdom. The king sent armies of monkeys in all directions to look for Sita. I have come here after crossing the ocean ….'.

Sita heard all this and looked up to see the source of the voice which seemed to be bringing news about her beloved Rama. Hanuman came down from the tree. And keeping his hands raised above his head in the 'anjali' pose, he approached her and asked her who she was, and whether she was not the Sita who was abducted by Ravana from the forest in the absence of Rama and Lakshmana. And then the conversation starts. Seven chapters (about 450 shlokas) of the ensuing scene of Sita-Hanuman interaction is a magnificent treat to readers of Valmiki. These chapters have great religious value for millions of believers in the spiritual sanctity of the Valmiki Ramayana who read these chapters as an offering to the Lord in the hope of a redress for their grievances.

Kamban does not lag behind. About 190 four-line stanzas of scintillating poetry take us to the Ashokavana itself to see the drama. There is no comparison possible or necessary between Valmiki and Kamban in this scene. Each is great in a unique way.

Tulsi, in view of the fact that his Sundarakand itself is far shorter than the other Sundarakandas, devotes 30 stanzas to this scene but includes shades of all the details in his own style of an avid devotee of Rama. And Hanuman's method of consoling Sita is by appealing again and again to the Divinity of Lord Ram and his superhuman might. 'Do not feel vexed at heart, mother' says he, 'Sri Rama loves you twice as much as You love him':

Jani jananI mAn jiya UnA / tum te prem rAm kE dUnA //

Incidentally this particular statement is Tulsi's own. Neither Valmiki nor Kamban say it this way.

Kamban narrates three wonderful stanzas of Rama's three deep-felt messages to Sita: (K.R. V – 547 to 549)

'I told her "it is very difficult to go through the forest. After all I am going to be in the forest only for a particular period of time. Till then, stay in Ayodhya itself, carrying on your usual services to the three mothers" . In reply to it she just went, put on the hermit's robes, and with anger against me visible in her face but with a body as if life has left it, came back and stood before me. Go and tell her this as a proof that you are my messenger".

'When we were taking leave of Minister Sumantra, who drove us till the outer limits of the city, she told him: "Go back and tell people at home that I have been relieved from my grief, by the good words of solace by Sri Rama. Please tell UrmiLA and others to take care of the pets and parrots that I have been nurturing all along". Tell her that I vividly remmeber this child like simplicity of hers'.

'By the King Dasaratha's orders first having been told of the prospect of the coronation, and then having been asked to go to the forest, when we finally left for the rest, before we even reached the walls of our fort in Ayodhya , Sita was asking "Have we reached the forest?". Tell her I remember this also'.

Kakasura's story, recalled by Sita as a message back to Rama, occurs in all the three Sundarakandas. Valmiki does not give it in Aranya Kanda. It comes here as a surprise. And he crowns it by making Sita say at the end: " Ask him Why he is not using that B rahmastra now against the Rakshasas"! This realistic presentation of pathos is Valmiki's forte!.

Kamban adds another informative story in Sita's message. Kamban's poetic imagination shoots up to the sky here:

En Or in uyir men kiLikku yAr peyar IkEn
manna enRalum mAcu aRu kEkayan mAdu en
annai tan peyar Aka en anpinoDu annAL
conna meymmozhi solluthi meymmai thoDarnthOy//
I (Sita) asked him, What shall I name this pet parrot of mine?.
Immediately he replied 'Give the name of my faultless mother
, the daughter of the Kekaya King'.Tell him this.

We shall close now with this interesting episode unique to Valmiki Ramayana. Hanuman has finally located Sita in the Ashoka garden, met her, talked with her, reassured her, exchanged tokens with her, and taken leave of her. Then he decides to do sufficient havoc to the fruits and trees in the garden in order to attracts attention from the Rakshasas, so that he may be taken to their King, Ravana.. (In Tulsi he takes permission from Sita to eat the fruits from the trees). The Rakshasis go to Sita and ask her who this monkey is, with whom she was seen conversing. Sita replies that she does not know him and this statement of Sita is a constant topic for debate among scholars whether Sita was right in denying knowledge about Hanuman. Her actual words are: (Sundara-kanda, 42 - 8, 9, 10):

rakshasAM kAma-rUpANAM vijnAne kA gatir-mama //
yUvam-eva-asya jAnIta yo'yaM yad-vA karishyati /
ahireva hyaheH pAdAn vijAnati na saMSayaH //
aham-apy-atibhItAsmi naiva jAnAmi ko'hyayaM /
vedmi rAkshasam-evainaM kAma-rUpiNam-AgataM //

What means do I have for knowing about Rakshasas who take forms at will? You alone ought to know who he is and what he is about.Indeed a serpent alone has true knowledge about the movements of a serpent. No doubt about it. I too

> am exceedingly frightened and do not at all know who he really is. Of course I think he is a Rakshasa who can change his form at will.

We can go on like this enjoying all the three sundarakandas. Before we end this enjoyment we should point out briefly some more of the unique master-touches of each poet in the narration of the story .

- Right in the beginning, as soon as Hanuman overpowers Lankini, he debates about how to see Sita all alone one-on-one ('ekAmekAM') so that he can report to Rama what she thinks and says.) (V.R. V-2-37). This is not in Tulsi or Kamban.
- Ravana arrives at the Ashoka grove to see Sita. Valmiki simply says he was accompanied by several members of his harem. But Kamban builds on this. 'Ravana's entourage consists of the celestial damsels Urvasi, Menaka and Tilottama. One of them carries his sandals, another his sword, another his betel leaves'. Willing suspension of disbelief is necessary to appreciate this extravaganza of Kamban's depiction!
- When Ravana pleads with Sita to accept him, he says: "Your husband and brother-in-law are only coward-men who got cheated by just a deer in golden hue". This kind of ridiculing speech is not there in Tulsi or Valmiki.
- Ravana explains to Sita why he had to use the ruse of a deer and a consequent isolation of her to kidnap her. He says he could have killed Rama in a fight and could have captured Sita. But in that case Sita would take off her own life and that would beat his purpose! This argument is in Kamban but not in Valmiki or Tulsi.
- When Ravana finally in anger at Sita's words, lifts up his sword against Sita, it is Dhanyamalini, one of the women of Ravana, who prevents it by weaning him away from the act. This is in Valmiki. Tulsi says that it was the chief Queen Mandodari herself who did so. Kamban simply says, Ravana had one look at his sword and said to Sita: "The time to take your life has now come down from twelve months to two months. Decide what you want to do" and he left.
- When Sita decides to take away her own life because of desperation and Ravana's threatening to end her life in two months, Kamban adds to her logic an extra foresight, namely, the argument that Rama may not accept her even if he wins over all the Rakshasas! (K.R. V – 507).
- In order to encourage Sita Hanuman says to her '*mattaH pratyavaraH kaScit nAsti sugrIva sannidhau*' (meaning: There is not a single person in our Sugriva's army, who is lower than me in prowess); So don't fear. We shall overcome Ravana. This is in Valmiki, not in Kamban or Tulsi.
- Go and enjoy the Ashoka vana fruits says Sita in reply to Hanuman's saying he is hungry and wants to eat the fruits. This is in Tulsi, not in Valmiki or Kamban.
- When Hanuman was bound by Brahmastra, he was only apparently bound, says Siva to Parvati in Tulsi's version. This is not in Valmiki. The fact that he was only apparently bound is in Kamban. Valmiki says the binding became ineffective because he was further bound by mechanical ropes. (V.R. V – 48 – 49).
- Hanuman sees Ravana in the latter's assembly in all the regal majesty and splendour and is rightly amazed at the extravaganza and the pomp and transparent

power of the King of Lanka. Hanuman frankly appreciates the regality and power of Ravana, through the words: '*aho rUpaM aho dhairyaM aho satvam aho dyutiH*' (V.R. V- 49 – 17). This is not there in Kamban or Tulsi.

- When Hanuman was burning the entire Lanka by the flames in his tail, he thinks and regrets he might have burnt Sita also in the process and curses himself. This is in Valmiki, not in Tulsi or Kamban.
- On the northern side of the Ocean, after Hanuman returns, the monkey army chiefs discuss whether they should go now and invade Lanka or go north and tell Rama about Sita's presence in Lanka. This is in Valmiki, not in Tulsi or Kamban.
- On the northern side of the Ocean, when Hanuman returns, he tells the other members of his group about his successful meeting with Sita, but does not tell them, out of modesty, how he fought the Rakshasas and how he set fire to the city of Lanka. This is in Kamban, not in Valmiki or Tulsi.
- When reporting to Rama Hanuman says the Rakshasis were put to sleep by his mantras. This is in Kamban, not in Valmiki or Tulsi.
- Kamban delicately handles the way Hanuman breaks the news of his successful mission to Rama in a deftly manner. Before he even begins to talk Hanuman, as soon as he reaches Rama's location, he turns in the southern direction and bows down with hands joined above his head. This itself indicated to Rama that Hanuman must have seen Sita! This is not in Valmiki or Tulsi.

To know Kamban and live along with him in his imaginary excursions of fantasy, it is not possible by those who are only familiar with either Valmiki or Tulsi. Do you want to see before you the war between Hanuman on the one side and the Rakshasas on the other, in all its thrilling ups and downs? Do you want to see Lanka burning before your very eyes? Do you want to have a portrait of Rama for you to draw it minutely? Do you want to witness the gigantic *ViSva-rUpa* of Hanuman? Do you want to enjoy the literary heights of excellences of poetry, where the 'what' is indifferent and the 'how' is what matters much? Read Kamban!

Do you want to immerse yourself in the depths of devotion to God? Do you want to be mesmerised by the infinite splendour and compassion of Lord Sri Rama and Devi Sri Sita? Read Tulsi.

Do you want Hanuman to speak to you in person about his thoughts and vacillations? Do you want to shed tears at the suffering the spotless Sita underwent? Do you want to experience the drama of your own monkeyish mind play tricks with you? Do you want to keep reading an endless epic without being tired out? Do you want to participate in questions of *dharma* and *adharma* from great souls like Vibhishana and Hanuman? Go to Valmiki.

Thus each complements the other two. Really these are three priceless gems from the ocean of Indian religious literature.

CHAPTER 5: A TOUCH WITH TWO CHAPTERS OF THE GITA

1. A Capsule Overview of the Gita

In a matter of probably an hour and a half Lord Krishna swung the astounding negative position that Arjuna took impulsively at the very start of the war, to an extremely concordant position, whereby he agreed to carry on the war. This historical dialogue between God and Man is what constitutes the *Gita*. It is considered to be 'the most beautiful philosophical song existing in any known tongue' by Robert Oppenheimer, the so-called 'Father of the Atomic Bomb'. The dialogue had two purposes; one obvious, and the other, hidden. The obvious purpose was to convince Arjuna on the need to fight and not to retreat on the plea of (misplaced) compassion. For this purpose Krishna uses five arguments as if he is arguing for a defense. The other purpose was to leave for the entire humanity the legacy of a divine sermon on how to live so that one is not born again to live. The teaching that came out thus from the divine mouth may be classified into five guidelines for spiritual living. Though the five arguments and the five teachings are symbiotically combined by the Lord and are spread throughout the dialogue the careful reader-seeker can isolate them as distinct threads that run through the *Gita*.

The very first argument that Krishna puts forward is the philosophical argument. What Arjuna is grieving about is only the personalities that are arrayed in the battle. But they are after all, ephemeral. They are not permanent, in the absolute sense. What is permanent is only the *Atman*, the essential spiritual entity of the individual soul. The *Atman* is ever-existing. You cannot harm it in any way. What dies is only the physical body. The soul within goes from body to body and undergoes different life-experiences. The *Atman*, which is the spiritual substance of the soul, does not go through any of these experiences, because it is an impersonal Absolute. This argument which is difficult to be comprehended in its entirety is the undercurrent of everything in the *Gita*. It is in fact the springboard from which every other argument or concept gets its substance.

The second argument that Krishna uses is the 'duty' argument, Arjuna is a born warrior and it is his duty ('*swaDharma*') as a *kshatriya*, the warrior-class, not to retreat from a just war, but fight to the finish. The third argument combines this with the attitude of performance of this duty. Duty has to be performed for duty's sake, not for the purpose of getting a reward or result. An attachment to the reward or the result accruing from the performance of the duty will sow the seeds of further action and duty and this never-ending chain will move into the next life also. Therefore duty has to be performed in a detached way. So Krishna tells Arjuna that fight he must, but without attachment, malice, envy or hatred. This is the well-known *karma-yoga* argument of the *Gita*.

At this point Krishna takes the discussion to a different plane and says that not only one should do one's duty without attachment to the fruits thereof, but one should do it without claiming the agency of action. The thought that 'I am the doer of this action' is the thin end of the wedge that brings into play one's ego and all its subsidiary members of the great gang of man's internal enemies. Nothing in the world takes place without the Will

of the Lord, and so if we think that we are the ones who are doing the action, we are only going down the spiritual ladder. This concept of the Lord being the Agent-Provocateur of every action brings with it the standard path of Devotion (Bhakti) to the Lord as the most popular path towards God. But in the Hindu metaphysics and philosophy the concept - 'It is all God's Will' - of the Lord being the power behind for everything raises a question that is very peculiarly Hindu in origin.

Hinduism spares no pains to declare from its loftiest summits, the vedas and upanishads, that God, in addition to being transcendent, is also immanent. That The Lord transcends every conception of space and time and causation is an acceptable theory to every religion. But not every religion goes to the extent of declaring that each animate and inanimate entity is also spiritual in essence. In other words, stripped of our external coverings like the body, mind and intellect, we are, each one of us, sparks of the divine, with that divine element residing, as it were, in our core of cores, our soul of souls. The Lord resides as our Consciousness in our heart of hearts. What we see, hear, smell, touch or taste is all what this Consciousness does. At this point arises the natural dilemma. If God is immanent in us and is the basic motivator and proprietor of all our thoughts and actions, then should He not be held responsible for all the ignoble thoughts and actions for which I am being held responsible as if I am the one who did them? To answer this dilemma Krishna puts forth his fifth argument to Arjuna. And by this argument He brings in the villain of the piece. It is prakriti, He says, that is responsible. What is Prakriti? The word *prakRta*, in Sanskrit, means, that which is currently ongoing, that which is the natural thing. Each individual brings along with him tendencies that have been accumulated from his past lives. Every thought and action that anybody does leaves an imprint of a memory (in the mind of the doer) and through that a familiarity, which in due time becomes a habit or tendency to think and do in the same way. These are the so-called *vAsanAs* that we bring from our previous lives. These *vAsanAs* shape our inborn character. This character is our *prakRti*. This is what makes us act and react in a particular way that becomes our own habitual style of action and response to events. So *prakRti* is the doer, says the Lord, and not the Lord Himself.

So Krishna says, elaborating His fifth argument, 'Arjuna, don't think that you can run away to the forest as a renouncer and forget this war. Your *prakRti* will not allow you to do it. You better go with your *prakRti* and act accordingly'.

These are the arguments which Krishna uses to convince Arjuna to go back to his normal role in the war. But in the process of all this dialogue the Lord covers a large ground of Hindu philosophy and thus leaves a legacy of a great teaching for the entire humanity. This becomes relevant in a modern context. And this is what makes the *Gita* a scripture even for our daily living. Krishna's teaching may be classified under five headings.

The first is on *yoga-sAdhanA*, that is, the discipline of the senses. Krishna gives it the very first priority in the spiritual ascent for any person. In fact it is not a project which can be finished in a certain time schedule. It has to be a life-long effort. The very effort matters. The senses always crave for sense-objects. That is their nature. But man, using his discretionary intellect, has to harness his will-power to control and monitor them into

the right channels. And, in this, Krishna says one may seek the help of the indwelling Lord. The Lord will not only help Man but shower His grace on him for him to have the strength for the spiritual climb. To propitiate the Lord one does not have to do fanciful worship or ostentatious rituals. These will only fan the fire of one's ego further. To remember the Lord at all times and be continuously aware of His omnipresence is what constitutes the deepest devotion to God. This path of devotion to the One Supreme Almighty who is also indwelling in every being is the second major teaching of the gita to humanity. The concept of the one supreme, even though there are many manifestations of Him, in the form of avatars and forms, is fundamental to the path of devotion.

But being devoted to God is not everything. One has to do one's duties, professional or personal, domestic or social, filial or moral, religious or secular, --- all duties that devolve on one, in such a way that no residual attachment or *vAsanA* sticks in the mind. For these residual *vAsanAs* are the obstacles in the upward spiritual path by which one reaches God. So the discharge of one's duties without any attachment is the obligation of every one. This is the great *karma* yoga of the gita. It is the contribution of the gita to world knowledge and culture. Krishna elaborately details how it could be practised. He says : Dedicate all your actions to Me. By thus dedicating all our actions to God we can experience an internal alchemy that takes place in ours own mind. For dedication to God means, doing only those actions that are acceptable to God and never doing those actions which are unacceptable to Him. Dedication is voluntary acceptance of 'suffering' for the sake of the God of dedication. The methodology of dedication is technically called *yajna*, by Krishna. Any action done selflessly without expectation of reward and with a sense of detachment, is called yajna. Do every one of your actions, as a yajna, says the Lord.

Thus the three teachings are: *yoga sAdhanA, bhakti and karma yoga*. Now come two deeper things. One is Surrender (*SharaNAgati*). Surrender even your will to God in the sense that thereafter you are nothing but an instrument in the hands of God. It is self-effacement, no doubt, but that is exactly what is meant by a total devotion to the Absolute.

The other teaching is in fact the final goal of Man. It may be called the Equanimous View of everything (*Sama-dRshTi*). The One Supreme, being the grandest in conception, being all-pervading, is called *Brahman* by the scriptures. Our perception has to widen in its subtlety to perceive this Absolute *Brahman* in every being, indeed in every creation of God, animate or inanimate. This impartial perception comes to One who has transcended all the dualities of the world like good and bad, happiness and misery, friend and foe, like and dislike, and heat and cold.. By *yoga sAdhanA, bhakti and karma yoga* one reaches the stage where one is ready for the other two: namely, to surrender even one's will to God and to be able to treat every experience the same equanimous way.

2. Yoga SadhanA (From the Sixth Chapter of the Gita)

Yoga SadhanA is a fundamental prerequisite for the ascent to the Spirit; and it is something that has to last one's lifetime. Yoga itself is a means by which through the process of controlling the senses one aims to reach the stage of a union with the Absolute.

And in the Yogic SadhanA it is the withdrawal of the senses and the mind that presents the greatest challenge. One can never tell oneself that the complete control of one's senses and their proclivity towards sense-objects have been once for all achieved; for they rear thir head at the most unexpected and inopportune times. The taming of the senses has to be a continuing exercise all the time. The process of '*pratyAhAra*' (withrawal of the senses) is therefore repeatedly emphasized by Krishna in the *Gita* many a time, though He never uses that particular word:

When man draws away the senses from the objects of sense, as the tortoise draws in his limbs into the shell, his intelligence sits firmly founded in wisdom. (2-58)

Such of the roving senses as the mind follows, that carries away the understanding, just as the winds carry away a ship on the sea. (2-67)

In the object of this or that sense, liking and disliking are set in ambush; fall not into their power, for they are the besetters of the soul in its path. (3-34).

When the soul is no longer attached to the touches of outward things, then one finds the happiness that exists in the Self; such a one enjhoys an imperishable happiness, because his self is in yoga, yoked with *Brahman*. (5-21)

The enjoyments born of the touches of things are causes of sorrow; they have a beginning and an end. Therefore the man of awakened understanding does not delight in these. (5 – 22).

That pleasure or happiness which is born from the contact of the senses with their objects, which at first is as nectar, but in the end is like poison, that is accounted rajasic. (18 – 38)

That unwavering persistence by which through Yoga, one controls the mind, the senses and the life, that persistence, O Partha, is satvic. (18-33).

In SANDilya-Upanishat, which is one of the 20 yoga-Upanishads, '*pratyAhara*' is explained in terms of five requirements:

- '*Vishhayeshhu vicaratAm indriyANAM balAt AharaNaM*' – Forcibly bringing back the senses which are roaming over the sense-objects;
- '*yadyat pashyati tat sarvaM AtmA iti*' – Whatever one sees or comes into contact with should be perceived as the Self itself;
- '*nityaM vihita-karma-phala-tyAgaH*' – renunciation of the fruits of all the daily obligated actions;
- '*sarva-vishhaya-parAng-mukhatvaM*' – being indifferent or unconcerned about all (outward) matters, or the sphere of objects;
- '*ashhTAdashasu marmasthAneshhu kramashaH mano-dhAraNaM'* – gradual fixation of the mind on the 18 special yogic spots of the body.

The *DhyAna yoga* that Krishna details in the 6th chapter of the *Gita* could as well be called *Atma-samyama-yoga* (Krishna uses this terminology in 4-27). It is the disciplining of the lower self which is then constrained to converge towards, and merge with, the Inner Self whereby the Inner Self is all that remains. This is the *samyama* (restraint and control) - a word, which, in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra stands for an integrated process of *dhAraNa* (concentration), *dhyAna* (meditation) and *SamAdhi* (Absorption in the Absolute). For the significance of the four limbs *PrANAyAma*, *pratyAhAra*, *dhAraNa* and *dhyAna* see Kapila *Gita* in the Chapter on 'Gems from Shrimad BhA.'.

Krishna emphasizes that this disciplining of the Self by which one ascends the peak of yoga (*yogArUDhaH* - 6 – 4) occurs only when one has achieved the state of *sarva-sankalpa-sannyAsI*. '*Sankalpa*' is determination to do something; so it represents the human will to act. Desire itself is a precursor of action and the will to desire is by itself a sankalpa. The renouncer of all such sankalpa's is the *sarva-sankalpa-sannyAsI* of *shloka* 4. When the lower self is thus disciplined and controlled by the will of the mind, that is when one is 'founded and poised' (Aurobindo's language!) in the higher Self, the Self which stands above the changes and perturbations of the natural being, or, as Shankara expresses in his Bhashya, one 'exists as one's immediate Self' (*sAkshhAt Atma-bhAvena vartate*). Then, everything appears to him as the *Atman*. Thus it is the *Brahma-jnAni* who is the foremost Yogi. For him the transitory relations like friend, well-wisher, indifferfent third person , neutral onlooker, hater, relative, merit or demerit – none of these make any difference in the equanimous mind (6 -9).

Such control of the mind and its functions comes from a deep practice (*abhyAsa*) of withdrawal from all mental and physical preoccupations. This practice involves the *yoga-abhyAsa* wherein the one-pointedness (*ekAgram* 6 – 12) is the first objective for concentration and contemplation. This one-pointedness (*ekAgrtA)* is the fundamental prerequisite for successful meditation. By constant practice if one can achieve the necessary on-pointedness, thereafter, wherever one is, the mind will not rest on the things around except ISvara. It is like butter not mixing with the water on which it rests, whereas before becoming butter the milk could not stand aloof from the water in it.

There are technical nuances of controlled breathing sanctified by a hoary spiritual tradition, to arrive at this concentration (*dhAraNa*). This concentration is of two kinds. According to Patanjali it is the containment of the mind within any of the centres of containment in the body. But the Vedanta type of concentration – which is what perhaps Krishna refers to – is fixing the mind on Him, at first, (cf. *mat-samsthAm* - '*saguNa-dhYAna*') and then, after due practice, fixing the mind on the impersonal Self (*Atma-samstham manaH kRtvA*- 6 – 25 – '*nirguNa – dhyAna*').

Meditation (*dhyAna*) follows concentration. DhyAna is *pratyaya ekatAnatA* (Patanjali's yoga-sUtra: III – 2). Pratyaya is reaction or counterflow or faith or assurance. *ekatanatA* is the continuance of the same thread of thought from moment to moment. In other words, the inner response and the outer concentration then become of one piece, one thread. '*samana-pratyaya-pravAha-kAraNam*' is the way ShankarAchArya explains it; it means the setting up of a continuous stream of similar thoughts. The beginning level of

meditation is the '*sthUla-dhyAna*' – meditation on something concrete, with form and name. The next higher level would be the meditation of Light or a Flame. Better than both is the *Sukshhma-dhyAna*, that is, meditation of THAT which is subtle, without form or name.

And Krishna lists the prerequisites (6 – 10) for this *yoga-sAdhanA* to succeed:

'*ekAkI*', alone with no mental or physical preoccupations;

'*rahasi sthitaH*', with no prop or support other than the Lord and therefore in complete silence;

The two, '*ekAkI*' and '*rahasi sthitaH*' together would imply there is complete renunciation of anything that is external or non-Self. When we allow thoughts to proceed we are still within the precincts of the intellect. Through silence we will be able to touch the deeper layers of the self, beyond intellect. In silence alone one can hear the inner voice.

'*yata-chittAtmA*' , with mind and self under full control. Here self means the external psycho-physical organism as a whole, '*bAhyaH kArya-karaNa-sanghAtaH*'.

'*nirASIH*', free from hope or desire; with no mental clingings; free from expectations.

'*aparigrahaH'*, devoid of all eagerness to possess and of all anxiety to save for the future; not owning or harbouring anything, not even the feeling of possession. This *aparigraha* is one of the five '*yamas*' that Patanjali also lists; and he adds that these 'yamas' are universally applicable, irrespective of birth (*jAti*) place (*desha*) time (*kAla*) occasion ('samaya') and the aparigraha has to be unhampered and unbroken ('*anavacchinna*'). In 4-21 Krishna uses the same combination of words to explain how an ascetic acts in this world. '*nirASir yatachittAtmA tyakta-sarva-parigrahaH*' – Shankara explains that this giving up all possessions means the sole aim of the bodily work is the maintenance of the body, and one does not have conceit even in that work –'*sharIra-sthiti-mAtra-prayojanam, kevalam tatrApi abhimAna-varjitam*'.

'*yata-cittendriya-kriyaH*' (6 – 12), the actions of the mind and the senses having been controlled;

'*brahma-chAri-vrate sthitaH*' (6 – 14), established in the vow of chastity; continence in word, thought and deed.

The one-pointedness is now directed towards the Lord, in the first instance. '*mat-chittaH*', '*matparaH*' says the Lord in 6 – 14. This process has 'nirvANa' (=mokshha) as its destination: '*nirvANa-paramAM*' 6 – 15. The mind becomes one-pointed, very much like the light in a windless spot (6 – 19). The mind is now anchored in the Self which is now self-perceived ('*AtmanA AtmAnaM pashyan*' – 6 – 20). This is an endless bliss ('*Atyantikam sukham*' – 6 -21). The joy is within, the sporting is within --'*antas-sukhaH,*

antar-ARamaH' (5 – 24). It is a delight solely in the Self ('*Atma-ratiH*'), it is a contentment solely with the Self ('*Atma-tRptiH*'), it is a Satisfaction alone in the Self ('*Atma-santushhTi*') – 3-17. It can be grasped only by the intellect, not the intellect which reasons with sense data and frames concepts on that basis. That intellect can grasp only indirectly. When Krishna refers to this bliss as '*buddhi-grAhyaM*' (6 – 21), He means Reason which works in its own right. It is a direct awareness of identity, of becoming one with the Absolute – like one wakes from dream into wakefulness. The Ka.U. speaks about it:

> It cannot be attained through speech, nor through mind, nor through eye. How can it be known to any one apart from him who speaks of It as existing?
> *naiva vAcA na manasA praptum shakyo na cakshhushhA /*
> *astIti bruvato'nyatra katham tad-upalabhyate //* Ka.U.. *II-3-12.*

And one may recall from the Br.U.: II – 4- 14:

> *vijnAtAram are kena vijaniiyAt, yenedam sarvam vijAnAti tam kena vijAnIyAt* /How does one know the Knower? How does one know that by which all this is known?

This ultimate prize, *lAbha*, is the gain of the Self; there is no prize greater than it (6 -22). Having got it one is not overpowered even by grievous pain (*guruNApi dukhena na vicAlyate* – 6-22). This disjunction from experienced pain is Yoga (*dukha-samyoga-viyogam*) (6 – 23). It is the greatest of all gains and the treasure beside which all others lose their value.

The main stress is on the stilling of the emotive mind. Even the mental thought has to be ultimately silenced in the presence of the self-existent Absolute within. Every time the restless mind flickers from its steadiness it should be controlled and brought back to the Self. (6 – 26). There is no other way. When the mind is thoroughly quietened the peerless bliss accrues to the Yogin (6 -27) and this is actually the *Jivan-mukta* stage. *SannyAsa* (Renunciation) and Yoga are the obverse and reverse of the same coin of spiritual perfection. This is the stage of unsurpassed contact with supreme *Brahman*. Such a *JIvanmukta* behods the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. (6 – 29). He sees pleasure or pain in all beings on the analogy of one's own Self. (*Atmaupamyena* 6 -32) He does not act against any one, does not injure any other. He adheres to right perception and is deemed supreme among Yogins. He is superior to the performer of austerities. He is superior even to the knower of the Vedas. He excels those who do works. (6 – 46) Among even these Yogins the one who is full of faith and worships the Lord as his inner Self he is the foremost of them all. (6 – 47).

3. One in a Million (From the Seventh chapter of the Gita)

Votaries of Spirituality generally say that when Divinity wills it, there is nothing in the world of science and matter to prevent it from happening the way Divinity wants it to. Divine Will is sufficient to make things happen, law or no law. It is such a Divine Will that led to the manifestation of the Universe from its unmanifested state. Krishna takes

up this topic in the seventh chapter of the *Gita*. After having spent quite some time elucidating the nuances of Karma Yoga in four chapters and after a blow-by-blow account of the process of *Yoga SAdhanA* in the sixth chapter. He now changes the tune of the exposition. He now starts making declaration after declaration at a high level on the fundamentals of the philosophy of Hindu Religion. As every student of Hinduism knows it is not possible to bifurcate Hindu religion from its philosophy. The two sprout forth with great emphasis and authority from the Lord Himself in the seventh chapter.

And the very first thing He says is to connect it to the *Yoga-SAdhanA* that was being discussed in the previous section. By the practice of Yoga you will know Me, says He, with all the comprehensive knowledge without any trace of doubt. You will be the *One in a Million* who will know Me like this, assures Krishna. Probably one in a thousand tries to know Me and among them again, one in a thousand really knows Me as **VAsudeva** who is all that is. This is one of the more important names of the Lord. It has very special significance. 'After several lives, the wise man reaches Me', says the Lord. 'Very rare indeed is the great soul who understands that VAsu-deva is all there is'. (*Gita*: 7 - 19)

bahUnAm janmanAm ante jnAnavAn mAm prapadyate /
vAsudevas-sarvam iti sa mahAtmA sudurlabhaH.//

The root *vas* means to dwell, to cover, to be the source of. The root *div* from which the word '*deva*' is derived means to play, to conquer, to create, to shine, to be worshipped, to be the lord of. Thus there are several meanings for *vAsudeva.* He who dwells in or covers everything. cf. The first line of I.U.*:*

ISAvAsyamidam sarvam :
This entire universe is clothed,
covered or inhabited by the Lord, the Ruler, the Creator.

His very dwelling in the hearts of men is His sport. He covers everything by His *mAyA*. He is the source of eerything. He is the source of all divinities. He is sought after by all seekers of *moksha*. Just as birds protect their little ones in the nests by covering them with their wings, the Lord resides in our hearts and protects us by His Grace. More than that the entire universe is in the stomach of His cosmic Form. *In Him reside the universe with all the divines, human beings, birds, animals, reptiles, divine musicians, asuras:* (cf. Prayer *sloka* in the preliminaries to the *Vishnu sahasra-nAmaM*):

antah-stham yasya viSvam sura-nara-khaga-go-bhogi-gandharva-daityaih

The fact that the entire universe so resides is dramatically brought forward in the mythological story of the great compassion of Lord *Shiva* who

placed the dreadful poison, that emanated from the churning of the Milk-ocean, in His mouth, still did not swallow it but only kept it stifled in the throat, so as not to injure the universe of all beings residing in His cosmic stomach: (S.L. 31)

nAlam vA paramopakArakam-idam tvekam paSUnAm pate
paSyan kukshigatAnS-carAcara-gaNAn bAhyasthitAn rakshitum /

sarvAmartya palAyan-aushadham-atijvAlAkaram bhIkaram
nikshiptam garaLam gale na gilitam nodgIrNam-eva tvayA //

There are three striking declarations made by Krishna in this seventh chapter. It is before making these declarations that He makes the 'One in a Million' prelude. The three declarations are:

1. My Power or *Shakti* is two-fold. One may be called the Lower *PrakRti*. It has eight constituents, namely, the five elemental fundamentals plus Mind plus Intellect and plus Ego. The other is the Supreme *PrakRti* which is the seed of all life. (*Shloka*s 4 & 5)
2. All the becomings of Nature are from Me, in fact from my divine *MAyA*, which is very hard to overcome. (*Shloka* 13 & 14)
3. Whatever form in which My devotees worship Me with faith, I firm up that faith of his. (*Shloka* 21); enveloped in my own yoga-*mAyA* I do not reveal myself to all (*Shloka* 25, first half).

These three constitute, in fact, the bottom line conviction of the Hindu Faith. The above Knowledge has to be learnt from one's *Guru*, without any argument. Because logic falls back at that level: '*yato vAco nivartante'* says the Upanishad. This is *jnAna* – Spiritual Knowledge. *VijnAna* is the subjective experience that follows from it. Once this is known there is nothing more to be known. (7 – 2). '*kasmin nu bhagavo vijnAte sarvamidam vijnAtam bhavati*' (Mu.U.). The three declarations understood in all their fullness explain why Vasudeva is all there is (*Shloka* 19).

The Absolute *Brahman* itself may be considered to have two facets of power potential: *parA shakti* (Supreme power or energy) and *aparA shakti* (the other power or the not-so-supreme power). Because it is the source of all knowledge and enlightenment, it is also called *vidyA* (knowledge) or *chit shakti* (the power of Consciousness, also, the Power that is Consciousness). Only a tiny fragment of this becomes *JIva* or the embodied soul. In fact *JIva* is nothing but matter viewed in relation to spirit (*Chit*). But where did this matter come from? For this we have to look at the other power of *Brahman*, namely, *parA shakti*. It is this that produces the five elements and therefore the entire universe. In other words the aparA *shakti* creates matter and nature. Thus it is the source of all that is inert.

The words *pradhAna* and *prakRti* are used in this connection synonymously with *aparA shakti*. The word *pradhAna* means chief, principal or pre-eminent and has a derived meaning, 'principally inherent' or 'predominant'. The neuter gender word *pradhAnaM* is used by Sankhya philosophy to denote the first evolver, originator, or source of the material world – in other words, the primary germ out of which all material appearances are evolved. The word *prakRti* means nature or natural form or the natural condition or state of anything. As distinguished from *purusha*, the person or the experiencer, it is the original source of the material world consisting of the three essential qualities *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* in subtle form.

Thus *aparA shakti* is *pradhAna* because it is the most fundamental root of all that presents itself to us as the physical universe. It is *prakRti* because it is the most natural thing. It is also called *kshetra*, meaning the field or the soil, because it is the base or canvas on which manifestations of nature take place. It is insentient in the sense that the consciousness or the *chit* facet of *Brahman* is not patent. Therefore it is *jaDa*, meaning, inert. It is also called *avidyA*, meaning Ignorance, here indicating the cosmic negation of knowledge. Again, though its effect, the universe, is perceptible, by itself is not perceptible to the senses and so it is called *avyakta*, meaning the unmanifest. It is the unseen, unmanifest cause behind the universe. It is also perishable, because sometimes it disappears in the cosmic cycle of creation and dissolution. Therefore, it is *kshara*, the perishable. Finally it is totally deceptive, with its power to conceal the truth and its power to project falsities; so it is *mAyA*, the magical. In fact it is the personification of the Supreme Spirit, the *parA shakti*, in the creation. This is the matter component in the entire universe.

On the other hand, *JIva*, which is the spirit component of the universe is a fragment of the *chitshakti* of *Brahman* . Only when life enters the physical conglomeration of matter do we get *JIva*. *JIva* is matter in which spirit has permeated. Recall

tat sRshhTvA; tadevAnuprAvishat. (T.U.).
He created it; and then He entered it (through immanence)

The *chit shakti* of *Brahman* functioning through matter envelopment becomes the living organism. Man devoid of matter is the eternal and infinite spirit. When spirit is thus enveloped by matter it gets the name *JIva*. He is the One who cognizes the *kshetra*, the field, and thus gets the name *Kshetrajna*, the knower of the field. He is the *Purusha* with all his individuality. Without the interaction of *purushha* and *prakRti*, spirit and matter, there is no expression, no experience. When man looks beneath his insentient matter-layer he is nothing but sentient vital consciousness. Mind itself is matter, which is itself the play of *PrakRti*. That which rules the functions of a given mind and intellect and determines its activities in the world outside is the unmanifested factor called the *vAsanA*s. In its macrocosmic aspect, the total universe of men and things and their behaviours spring from the aggregate of *vAsanA*s of all living beings. This totality of *vAsanA*s is the source of the whole universe. It is because of this that the *JIva* is under the spell of *prakRti*, alias *mAyA*. In this sense *prakRti* is also called the original *prakRti* (*mUla-prakRti*). *Brahman* functions through *mUla-prakRti* to bring about the universe of men and things. That is why *LalitA-sahasranAma* calls Mother Goddess as *vyakta-avyakta-svarUpiNI*, meaning, She is manifest (vyakta) universe and She is also the unmanifest (*avyakta*) cause behind the universe. The play of matter and spirit in this manner is the cause of *samsAra* – more precisely, it is *samsAra*.

Though the Sankhya terminology of *Purusha* and *PrakRti* is accepted by Vedanta their doctrine of independence of *PrakRti* is not so accepted. Whatever objects are constituted by *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and generated by the Karmic forces of living beings due to their *vAsanA*s, know them all to be born of Me alone, says Krishna In *Shloka* 12 of Chapter 7. Just as Ice and steam are but water, diamond is but carbon, jewelry is nothing but gold, pots are but clay, all matter is nothing but *Brahman*; *Brahman* alone is the truth;

all else is the superimposition of name and form. The body is not the Truth; it is the *Atman* which resides in the body that is the Truth. The body has to be called *jaDa* (inert) even before the so-called death occurs. Listen to Tayumanavar in Tamil:

kaDattai maNNenal uDainthapodo inthakkarumac-
caDalattaip-poy enal iRanthapodo collattarumam.
Do we have to call the pot but clay only when it is broken?;
Do we have to call this body as false only when it is dead?.

And Krishna regrets for the world: (*Shloka* 13): Due to the transformation of these three *guNas* into attachment, aversion, delusion and so forth the entire world of living beings is deluded; and they fail to cognise Him. The moss that grows in the water hides the water itself; the clouds that gather in the sky cover the sky; the qualities that have their origin in Him themselves hide Him. This is the 'Agony of God'.

He lists four types of wrong-doers. Simple fools, - *mUDhAH* – are one category. The lowest among humans – *naRadhamAH* – form another category. Those whose knowledge has been robbed by *mAyA* are the third category. And the fourth is the category who are already fully overcome by demonish attitudes. None of them reach the Lord. Much less: none of them will be able to know Him as the unborn and the unmutable (7 – 15 & 25)

na mAm dushhkRtino mUDhAH prapadyante naRadhamAH /
mAyayA apahRta-jnAnAH AsuraM bhAvamAshritAH//
mUDho'yam nAbhijanAti loko mAM ajamavyayaM //

And in contrast, in the next *shloka* #16, He categorises the right-doers (*sukRtinaH*) into four categories. Interestingly, He ranks the *jnAni* at the top of his list (*Shloka* 17). It is this *jnAni* who must now be understood as the One in a million – though we can ourselves list a good number from history and mythology of the Indian nation, such as, the four boy-sages Sanaka, Sanandana, SanAtana and Sanatkumara, Prahlada, Shuka, JaDa-bharata, Bhishma, Bhaskararaya, Jnaneshvar, VyAsa, VaSishTa, Ramakrishna, Narada, KabirdAsa, Ramana, TirujnAna-sambandar, Meera, Sadashiva Brahmendra and many more. All these were 'ever in union with the Absolute' (*nitya-yukta*) and exhibited the '*eka-bhakti*' (exclusive devotion) to the Lord (*Shloka* #17).

These are the ones who should be accredited with the unique status of the 'One in a Million' given by Krishna in *Shloka* 19 (already quoted above) as great souls who are rare: cf. *sa mahAtmA sudurlabhaH*.

The others are carried away, actually hijacked, by their own individual desires which draw them towards other objectives, other than the Absolute. (cf.7-20). These 'other objectives' (*anya-devatAH* of *shloka* 20) have to be understood as referring to all lesser objectives than reaching the Self. We shall use shloka #17 (Ch.7) as our springboard for understanding this. Shloka 17 says: Among the four kinds of devotees, the jnAni (the Enlightened Devotee), who is always in union with the Supreme Lord with one-pointed devotion, is the dearest to the Lord. The key-words here are: "Always in union with Him" (*nitya-yuktaH*) and "One-pointed Devotion" (*Eka- bhaktiH*). So when in

shloka #20 he refers to "Other deities" (*anya- devatAs*) He is only reasserting the `One-pointed Devotion' aspect. The `other deities' are all those distractions which take you away from the thought of the supreme Lord who is none but the Self. Any thinking about the non-self is a distraction and a subservience to the `other deities'. Whether you worship Shiva or Shakti or Vasudeva or Christ or Mohammed it does not matter. Are you identifying It with the Self or not? That is the question. Anything which is identified with the non-self, even if it be a sacred deity in a certain form or representation, is considered to be a propitiation of deities other than the Supreme. This is the implication of the use of the words `other deities' in Shloka 20.

4.The Magic of MAyA

The advaitin Yahoo-group once wanted me to write something on *MAyA*. I was wondering what I should do. when, lo and behold! MayA Devi was right there before me. Her face was a little blurred, so I can't describe it to you. But the profile was so clear that it could be only Her Majesty, the Empress of the whole Universe. She had a bewitching, at the same time enchantingly mischievous, smile; but that is what I thought, because the blurred face defied any precise description. But what was more thrilling, was that She Herself started to talk! Here is the verbatim report!

(M: MayA Devi; K: Krishnamurthy).

M: Are you surprised?
K: Is it You, Mother *MAyA* Devi?
M: Don't you recognise Me?
K: What? Recognize? Have I seen you, before?
M: You are seeing me all the time.
K: You mean I am seeing the world all the time?
M: You are a member of advaitin list, even a moderator; what else do you expect?
K: Mother, please don't quiz me. Please give us a message.
M: You folks are flooding yourselves with messages all the time. Many of you don't even read them. And you want me to add my message to all that?
K: How else do we understand your mysterious ways?
M: What are you all going to do after that understanding?
K: Well, ... I thought that would open for us the gate to Moksha; would it not?
M: Have I not made Krishna tell you , "my *MAyA* is difficult to transcend"?
K: Then, how are we ever to get at the root of the matter?
M: Again you are only showing your scholarship. What do you mean by `root of the matter'?
K: I meant: `the rock bottom fundamental principle, without which nothing works'.
M: But you know it is within you yourself and you are not supposed to search outside.
K: Mother, I am not competent to win you over in any argument or debate. Tell me clearly what is it that I should be doing, if I want to reach The Ultimate. Why is it you are playing tricks with us, even when we are all honestly seeking Truth?

M: I am not playing tricks with you. It is you folks who have studied too much without giving yourself the time to pause to think about what you have studied. Many a time I have shown you all, both in your personal lives and in your professional lives, that you cannot win.
K: Yes, I understand. I do keep telling that to my audience whenever I talk or write to them. But somehow, when it finally comes to counting my marbles, I am helpless and I would like to be one up! Why is it so, Mother?
M: That is exactly what I am telling you. You may want to be one up against others like you in this world. You will learn that is the wrong path in its own due course. But when you want to be one up against Me and My ways, you are totally mistaken; and that is where I show up. And the only force, if at all, that will help you against my powers, is the Grace of the Lord God. If you rely on your own capabilities more than your reliance on God, you are already in My clutches.
K: I don't understand what you mean by `being one up against You'. I don't think I have ever done that.
M: Well, that is what you think. Every time you people want to define good and evil in precise terms, that is what you are doing. The tangled knot of life is not to be cut into an unquestionable single law of truth and falsehood. Dharma must be sought not by rejecting ignorance or falsehood, but rather through them in *tapasya*, strength, energy and purifications. Whenever you shortcut this trodden path and plan to arrive at the destination quickly, you are trying to be `one up against Me'!
K: Mother, it is all confusing. May I pray to you to lead me out of this confusion?
M: Don't pray to Me. I am not here or anywhere. Actually I am not what I am. I am a non-being. Pray to the Being that always is.

(And the apparition was gone!)
And then it was that I wrote the following:

Encountering *MAyA* means contending with all the following eight intangibles:

1. Her Incomprehensibility.
2. Her Miraculousness.
3. Her Infinite Power.
4. Her Intranscendability.
5. Her Universality.
6. Her Omnipresence.
7. Her Ordained Subordinateness.
8. Her Non-existing Existence

.
MAyA is incomprehensible. That is why all Masters say: Don't try to understand mAYA with your intellect. Pray for transcending the effects of *MAyA* with the help of the Supreme Presence in you. *mAmeva ye prapadyante mAyAmetAm taranti te*, says Krishna (B.G. 7 – 14).

MAyA is miraculous. She can perform all the miracles of Nature as well as all the miracles that appear to mystify our scientific understanding. She can hide what is Real but She can also make the non-real appear as real. (B.G. 7 – 25: *nAhaM prakASas-sarvasya yogamAyA-samAvRtaH*).

MAyA's power is limitless. Even the great Sages who by the severity of their penances acquire wonderful powers either by yoga-siddhi or simply by the Grace of the Supreme have been known to have succumbed to the effects of *MAyA*. Even the good things that happen to us can draw us into the vortex of *MAyA*. This is the *aiSvaraM yogaM* of the Absolute (B.G. 9 – 5).

MAyA is intranscendable, meaning, She is known to have been the cause of all effects. So long as we are in the world of effects, which we always are, we are not one with the Cause of all causes. The attractions towards sense-objects is what makes us stay in the world of effects. This attraction is nothing but *MAyA*. That is why B.G. 7 – 14 says She is '*duratyayA*' (intranscendable).

MAyA is universal, (*yayedam dhAryate jagat* B.G. 7 -5 & 7-13 : *ebhissarvamidam jagat)*) in the sense that without *MAyA* there is nothing that exists, nothing that existed, nothing that will exist.

MAyA is omnipresent (*daivI*: 7-14) almost as the Supreme Reality Itself. One is mistaken for the other; this is our second nature (cf.B.G. 3 – 33).

MAyA has been ordained to be subordinate to the Supreme (*mayAdhyaksheNa* B.G. 9 – 11) and only to the Supreme.

YA mA sA MAyA – this is the definition of *MAyA*. What does not exist (absolutely) is *MAyA*.

Advaita recognises the truth of all the above eight. The esoteric meaning of GitA (VII – 4) indicates it. The non-advaitins, in their attempts to establish something other than advaita have always to negate one or more of the above. And in doing this, they fall into the trap of one or more of the same *MAyA*, which they try to negate.

For example, some question the locus of operation of *MAyA*. But `operation' is an effect. And, as we saw above, *MAyA* transcends all effects. Some others seek authority for the statements about *MAyA*. Expressing authority through word of mouth or by writing is itself a mAyic action and so one commits the error of self- reference. Others think that release from the world of *MAyA* is to go to a different world of existence with the divines. Not at all. The final release is to be relieved of the bondage of *MAyA*. It can happen in this world itself.

Others think that Brahman has transformed Itself into this universe which is distinct from It. It is the Miracle of *MAyA* that makes Brahman appear as this universe while Brahman still remains unchanged. Not only Brahman appears as this universe but also as the

individual Jivas each with a separate inner organ. Further, there are thousand other things which happen according to the rules of cause and effect. The affairs of this universe are happening in spite of us according to some schedule chalked out for them. If we observe all this carefully, maybe from the absolute point of view everything is a *MAyA* but in the mundane world of daily parlance, there is an admirable order that must have been initiated or chalked out by a very powerful force, far more powerful than all the powers that we know. That power is what is called *ISvara* (God). And this *ISvara* is taken by some to be itself the effect of *MAyA*. They ignore the fact that *MAyA* is subordinate to that very *ISvara*, who, from the absolute point of view, may however not be absolute! It is Brahman, that, appearing to be in association with *MAyA*, is the *ISvara* who monitors and manages both the universe and the JIvas. All this world of JIvas rolls about under His control. When that is so, for us to transcend this curtain of *MAyA*, and to get out also of His control so that we may realise the Brahman that is the core of Him as well as us, is not possible without the sanction of that power, namely *ISvara*. In other words only by the Grace of *ISvara* can our mind be overcome and Brahman-realisation can happen. We may be subject to the whims and fancies of *MAyA* but He is in total control of it. So even when He `does' so many activities under the guise of *MAyA*, He is always the actionless Brahman. '*prakRtiM Ashritya*' (Resorting to *PrakRti*) is a constant refrain in the literature. In Gita 9-8 He says '*prakRtim svAm avashTabhya*' (Pressing down upon my own *prakRti*). In Gita 4 – 6, He says '*prakRtiM svAm-adhishTAya*' (Leaning on my own *prakRti*). This resorting to prakRti does not involve any acxtion from Him. It is like our waking up from a dream. **To move from the dream state to our wakeful state we don't do any action; we just wake up, that is all. So also the Lord 'resorts' to *prakRti*.**

Thus even if we aim at the *MAyA*-associated Almighty, he absorbs us into the Brahman that has no trace of *MAyA*. Except for those rare ones whose good *samskAra* from previous lives is really strong all others are just unable to think seriously of getting themselves out of the rut of worldly activities and of the pulls and pushes of the mind. This mind itself is the creation of *MAyA*.

Brahman which is the same as Atman is the only thing which is untouched by *MAyA*. Even a little mixture of *MAyA* will make it different.

yadA hyevaisha etasmin-nudaram-antaraM kurute /
atha tasya bhayaM bhavati //T.U. II -7 -5
When indeed this soul makes in this One (Atman)
even the smallest break, then for him there is fear.

ISvara Himself has such a mixture of *MAyA*.The universe which is totally mixed with that *MAyA* is being administered by that *ISvara*, who has *MAyA* with him (*MAyA-sahita ISvarah*). Brahman does not do any such thing as administration of the universe. Brahman has nothing to do with the universe or its affairs. Of course it is the substratum, basis of the universe; but from that Brahman it was *MAyA* that produced the vision of the universe. Brahman is not related to the universe.

CHAPTER 6: THE ABSOLUTE AS IT IS

1. Tip of the Iceberg

How to describe God? Words cannot express Him. The eyes cannot see Him. The ears cannot hear Him. He cannot be indicated as this or that. He cannot be related to something as subject and object. He is taller than the tallest. He is shorter than the shortest. There is nothing greater; nothing smaller. He cannot be predicated as the doer of some action, because the undoing of that action is also His. He cannot be attributed as the possessor of something because He possesses also the opposite of that something. He cannot be thought of by the mind, because He is not the *object* of any thought-process. He cannot be gender-specified, therefore to call Him as a 'He' itself is a failure of words. For all you know 'He' can be a 'She'! So the Upanishads also refer to Him as IT. It is incomprehensible, unfettered, uncontaminated, unattached. It has no before, no after, no middle, no inner, no outer. It cannot be classified by category or by action or by quality or by relation. Because He thus transcends everything and also includes everything, He is called *Vishnu* which means He who overlaps everything that can be conceived. He is beyond everything. He is beyond time, beyond space, beyond causation. He is the grandest, ever. He is the supreme-most. He is therefore *purushottama* -- which literally means the SUPREME PERSON . But here, 'person' does not simply mean a person in the ordinary sense of the word. The supremeness indicates that any *personification is itself transcended.* It indicates complete transcendence of everything. Our finite expressions can never do justice to the grandeur that is God. He is the Colossus, as it were, spanning everything. This is the **TRANSCENDENCE** aspect of God

He is immanent in everything. There is nothing in which He is not there. Whatever we see, whatever we hear. whatever we smell, whatever we touch, whatever we feel, is all full of that Divinity, that is He. The universe that is visible and can be also mentally visualised is the concrete expression of that self-luminous spirit that is He. He is therefore *viSvaM*, the Universe itself. Without Him there is nothing that exists. He is the substratum behind everything that is inanimate. He is the soul of everything that is animate. While He is infinitely higher than ourselves, He is also infinitely near to us. He is nearer to us than our hands and feet and mind. He is the soul of our souls. He is the Ultimate Reality behind everything that is tangible either to the senses or the mind. He is the Cause of every effect and so He is the Cause of all Causes. Not only does the Universe spring from Him but ultimately it dissolves in Him. So He is both the effective cause and the material cause.The nearest expression in 'name' and 'form' for this Immanent Absolute is the *Shiva-linga* which represents the Ultimate when the entire universe has merged into it. He is the One that survives in us from childhood to adulthood and through old age from birth, as the I that we talk of when we refer to ourselves. He dwells in us as the only permanent resident. He is the real, the inner 'I" . This 'I' never changes. If we write out all that might be called 'mine', including one's physical possessions, one's relatives, one's own body and limbs, mind, mental opinions, all that can be classified as 'my...' and throw out all this, then what remains is "I". This

‘I’ is the self of the upanishads. It is that which we see beyond right and wrong, beyond effect and cause, beyond past and future. He is the soul of our very understanding though we may not understand Him. He is Consciousness itself. He controls our very intellect from within.. He is the inner controller. He is the *antar-AtmA* of everything. This is the **IMMANENCE** aspect of God.

He is perfect. He is so perfect that we may not be able to visualise the perfection. This perfection, both in action and in peace, is symbolised by the *Shiva-naTarAja* icon in its famous dancing form. But God descends from this pedestal of perfection and assumes an imperfection in terms of a name and form so that we mortals may be guided from our extremities of imperfection onto the path towards perfection. This descent of the Divine from its divine pedestal is called an Avatara. The complete such Avatara is supposed to be Krishna. But in this Avatara God’s mystic powers of *tirodhAna* (= illusion, deception) have been so much interwoven with His other functions that, for us, it is difficult to understand the perfection in Him. Maybe that is why the Avatara as Rama has been extolled as the model of perfection for us humans to follow and emulate. He is an *AdarSa-purusha* (Model for Emulation). In fact he is called a *suvrata* -- one who has the best vows, the best character, the best behaviour. The word *vrata*, in Sanskrit, indicates a fundamental way of life from which one does not swerve. That His *vrata* is great, good, unexcelled, is what *suvrata* says. Rama’s *vrata* was five-fold: To give protection to all those who sought his refuge; To abide strictly by the promised words of the father and mother; to be responsible, as a king, to the people of his kingdom even at the cost of his own personal comfort; to be totally unperturbed in the most adverse of circumstances; and never to flaunt his real (divine) stature which was always hidden behind his human exterior. This five-fold *vrata* was so excellently and so exemplarily pursued by him throughout his life that even after several millenia, his very name itself is Divinity personified in the entire Hindu world. This is the ***Perfection*** aspect of God.

T*ranscendence*, I*mmanence* and P*erfection* constitute only the **TIP** of the iceberg, that is God! Here are just a few sample quotes from the Scriptures to this effect:

yo vijnAne tishTan, vijnAnAd antaraH, yam vijnAnam na veda, yasya vijnAnam SharIraM, yo vijnAnam antaro yamayati esha AtmA antaryAmy-amritaH .-- Br.U..III-7-22

He who dwells in the understanding, yet is within the understanding, whom the understanding does not know, but whose body the understanding is, who controls the understanding from within, He is your self, the Inner Ruler, the Immortal.

AaN allan; peN allan; alla aliyum allan;
KANalum allan; uLan allan; illai allan;
PENungal, pENum uru Ahum; allanum Am;
kOnai peridu udaittu em pemmanaik kurudalE
.--- Tiru-vai-mozhi (Tamil)
Neither male, nor female, nor sexless;
Nor visible to the senses; neither being, nor non-being;
He has that form you desire; He is also formless;
Impossible it is to describe our Lord.

paRRudal anRi undo adaikkalam pakarkinRAnai.
--- K.R. Yuddha Kandam:410 (Tamil)
He who has come to me as refuge,how can I do anything other than taking him ?

adaindavarkku aruLAn Ayin aRam en Am ANmai en Am
--- K.R. Yuddha Kandam:413
If we do not give refuge to those who seek refuge, what to speak of Dharma, what of manliness ?

Mama paN SaraNAgat bhayahAri.
--- T.R.: Sundarkand: 4 (Hindi)
My vow is to take away the fear out of those who take refuge in me.

sakRd-eva prapannAya tava asmi iti cha yAchate;
abhayam sarva-bhutebyo dadAmyetad-vratam mama.
V.R..VI-18-33Whatever being comes to me even for once and says he is mine, I give him protection and this is my *vrata* for life.

2. Satyam JnAnam anantam Brahma

Real, Consciousness, Infinite (*satyam jnAnam anantam brahma)* is the Upanishadic definition of the Transcendental Absolute. This definition is applicable irrespective of the religion on which we want to base the discussion. Such a definition is called 'Definition As Is'. The Sanskrit name for this is *svarUpa-lakshaNa*. In contrast there is the other type of definiton called *taTastha-lakshaNa*. The word '*taTa*' means 'shore' or 'bank'. When someone wants you to show the location of a river which is somewhere nearby but not visible, very possibly you may show a tree that stands on the bank of the river and say that the river is just where the tree is. Instead of using this much of language the common man may just say: 'That is the river', pointing to the tree. Here the tree is only a pointer to the river. The river, in other words, is indicated by the tree on the bank or shore. So also, the faint few-days-old moon is indicated by pointing to the space between two branches of yonder tree. And it must be noted that the moon has nothing to do with the branches of the tree; yet the branches of the tree help us to precisely look in the direction of the distant moon. That is why this type of definition is called a 'Definition by Indication'. The technical Sanskrit name for this, namely, '*taTastha-lakshaNa'* means exactly this. It means 'Definition' (of the river indicated by pointing the tree) 'located on (its) 'bank'. So also when we want to specify the Almighty who is the Transcendental Absolute *Brahman*, since we cannot handle or delimit the concept by our senses we just 'indicate' it (or Him!) by saying

He is the Father of the Universe.

Certainly this is a good pointer, since there can be no other than the absolute who can be the Father of the Universe. '*ahaM bIjaH pradaH pitA'* says the Lord in the 14th chapter of the *Gita*, meaning, 'I am the Father who plants the seed'. The concept of the Father of the Universe has two connotations. One is that He is the Creator of the Universe. The other is that He is the Soul of our souls, the Core of our core.

First let us take the Creation aspect. Where does He create the universe from? This question is often asked with great interest by all thinking persons. Much water has flown under the bridge of this debate whether He created the Universe out of Nothing or whether He created it from something other than Himself. Neither of the hypothesis is acceptable to either the *advaita* or the *viSishTAdvaita* philosophy. It is maintained by both that the Universe was created by the Lord out of Himself! In other words, He Himself is the material cause of the Universe. How can this be? The *Mu.U.*(I – 1 – 7) explains this by giving three analogies. He creates the Universe just as a spider creates its own web, says the Upanishad. But this actually raises a question in our minds: Does it mean then that the Lord is in need of a place just as the spider weaves its web so as to have a place of residence for itself? No, says the Upanishad, by giving another analogy. Just as plants grow from Earth so also the Universe emanates from the Lord, continues the scripture. But again a further question may arise. So then, is the Lord, probably, an inert entity like the Earth?! No, look at the third analogy: Just as hairs grow on a man, says the Upanishad. Thus the universe sprouts forth from the Lord spontaneously, without any effort, from His Cosmic Energy, called *prakRti*.

By the very presence of the omnipresent Absolute, the *prakRti* gives birth to the universe. It is actually a manifestation of the Absolute through the phenomenon called *mAyA*, which is only another name for *prakRti*. Manifestation is not transformation or a change of state. A change of state is called *pariNAma* or *vikAra.* The Absolute *Brahman* does not undergo a change when it appears as the universe. It just appears; that is all. Such an appearance where the original does not modify its own *svarUpa* (inherent 'form') is called a *vivarta* -- like the rope appearing as the snake.

The second aspect of the Lord being the Father of the Universe is its role as the Soul of our souls. The *Gita* in its seventh chapter uses the word *jIva-bhUtAM*, in this context. (Read the section on the Seventh Chapter of the *Gita* in the Chapter on 'A Touch of Two Chapters of the *Gita*'). It is the spark from the Light Absolute that becomes the life-giving Consciousness in every being. The intellectual understanding of these two facets of the Father of the Universe is not very difficult. The logic that sustains the explanation above certainly appeals to one's intellect. There is a vague feeling that it is *intellectually satisfactory*. But what we fail to achieve is an *emotional conviction* of the whole thing. Mark the italicized words. We are deliberately not saying: 'intellectual conviction' or 'emotional satisfaction'. Usually the word 'conviction' is associated only with intellect. But that is exactly the problem here. *So long as it is only an intellectual conviction, it does not lead to an experience at the spiritual level. Unless the conviction reaches the heart, that is, unless the conviction almost merges with that type of innate yearning that is more of an intuitive kind than of the speculative reasoning kind, the spiritual experience that arises will be only academic and to that extent is not real*. Real emotional conviction comes only from experience.

That experience goes through two processes of negation. Every time the Upanishads refer to this they use the phrase '*neti*' - meaning, *na iti*, not thus - and they use it twice every time, as if to emphasize that there are two negations. The first negation is a real negation that helps you transcend the *mAyA* which veils the Absolute and projects this universe as

a superimposition on Reality. To negate the Universe is therefore to see *Brahman* in everything and everywhere. In other words we have to see the *Brahman*, without its adjunct, *mAyA*. The second negation, however, is a different category of negation and is perhaps the more difficult one. It negates the adjuncts of the Self. In other words it transcends the five sheaths, which 'cover' the Inner Self. These five sheaths are: in order of increasing subtlety, the physical, the vital, the mental, the intellectual and the blissful self. This negation is important in the understanding of the Self defined by *satyam, jnAnaM* and *anantaM.*

It is interesting to note, in this context, that the two words '*deha*' and '*SharIra*' used for 'the body' in Sanskrit carry in their meanings the transient character of the physical body. What is continuously being burnt, destroyed or consumed is the '*deha*' - the root verb being '*dah*' to burn or consume. What is continuously undergoing a process of decay is '*SharIra*' - the root word being '*jharjhara*' indicating decayal or the process of being digested. Thus the body has no permanence. The primary object of all teaching in Vedanta is to eradicate the feeling of 'I-ness' in this body-cum-mind-intellect This is the path of Spirituality, even while remaining in this body. The object of all Hindu religious teaching is to save our Self from getting into another body after it leaves the present body. In other words, the object is to be able to die without being born again. It is a combination of four things, the Hindu scriptures tell us, that will ensure the non-occurrence of another birth;

catur-gagAra-samyukte punar-janma na vidyate

What are these four? They are four words beginning with the consonant '*ga*': *GangA, Gita, Govinda and GAyatrI.*

GangA is the water of the Ganges that flows from the Lord after washing His lotus feet - this has to be received on our head so that it may wash off the sins committed by the body (= *kAyena*).

Gita is the nectar of His music coming from His own mouth in the form of the greatest exposition of scriptural truths - this has to be received and kept in our mind so that it may wash off the sins created by the mind (= *manasA*).

Govinda is His sweet name - the dispenser and protector of the vedas is to be kept continuously kept in our tongue, the organ of speech, so that it may wash off the sins committed by our speech (= *vAcA*).It is said that,

> *sins of the mind will land one into a birth at a lower level of evolution;sins of speech will end up in one being born in the animal world thus losing the capacity to speak;and sins committed by the body will result in one becoming inanimate and inert as lifeless matter.*

Grandfather Bhishma of the Mahabharata was divine in his previous birth, but had to be born as a human, Bhishma, because as a divine he once allowed his mind to be infatuated just at the sight, for a second, of a danceuse whose shoulder-covering slipped, for a

moment, during the dance. In the biography of Shirdi Sai Baba there is the story of two, otherwise, very pious, brothers, who quarreled endlessly using abusive and filthy words of each other and so were born in the next birth as two cows. In the Ramayana we have the story of *ahalyA* who had to be immobile for ages, just because she allowed her modesty to be assaulted by the King of the Divines

GAyatrI is the very breath, if it can be so called, of the Lord Absolute, as to be received and treasured in the heart so that ultimately it may open up the gate of Self-Realization. It is the One thing that unveils the vastness of the Infinite to our heart.

The passage from the finite to the Infinite, is not on the physical, mental or intellectual plane. It has to be a transformation of the heart. It is by that internal transformation alone that one hopes, with the Grace of the Absolute, to have the experience of the Infinite. Actually the Lord expresses His agony, as it were, when He says: (*Gita*, VII -26):

> *I know all the past, all the future and all the present, but nobody knows Me.*

Instead of trying to know Him we often spend time in discussing mundane trivialities.

> For instance, every one of us spends time, money and energy to enjoy the sunrise and sunset, particularly at certain key tourist spots - but what does not come to our minds is the fact that every sunrise and every sunset is taking away our life and must be a reminder for us to hasten to know what is to be known, *satyasya satyaM* - the Truth of Truth.

The sage Ramana puts the occupation with mundaneness graphically: 'I tell you there is no snake; there is only the rope. But you want to spend your lifetime in researching whether the snake that appears to you is of this variety or that variety, whether it is a cobra or not'!

To continue with the same analogy, a very standard one in Vedanta literature, one notices that the rope is the more substantial one whereas the snake is only an appearance, a manifestation, a phenomenon that comes and goes. There is no permanent reality to it. In the same manner, the only Immutable and ever-permanent Reality is the Absolute *Brahman* - which may be taken either in The Personal Form (the Supreme Transcendental Personality) or in the Impersonal 'Form'. For Him the six 'waves' (= *Urmi*s) of *samsAra* are non-existent. But these matter very much for us, because they are the ones which create all the ups and downs, pleasures and pains, in fact all the dualities in our lives. They are well-known to us but we are so much engrossed with them that we are not aware of the need to isolate and brand them as only the transient 'waves' of *samsAra*. They are: aging, death, suffering, infatuation, hunger, and thirst.

In addition, there are six *vikAra*'s namely, six transformations or changes of state that all beings are subject to, but the Lord is not. These are: we exist, we are born, we grow, we mature, we decay, we die.

The Lord, on the other hand, is not subject to these changes of state because, He transcends the dualities implied in their description. Thus neither the six *Urmi*'s nor the six *vikAras* apply to Him. That is why we have to bask in His Light in order to overcome the six *Urmi*'s and transcend the six *vikAra*'s. The esoteric meaning of the six faces of Lord *subrahmaNya*, the six-faced God, is just this. His six faces give us the spiritual strength to overcome these. In fact every manifestation of the Lord has this purpose.

To continue with the analogy of the rope and the snake, having disposed off the snake that it was never there, we now try to understand the 'rope'! In other words, having disposed off the status of the created universe that it is only a passing appearance, we now go to the root of the matter.

What is the basis or locus of this visible universe? The only way by which we seem to understand anything is by our mind. But we have seen above that the mind itself is transient. The Reality is deeper than the mind. A little analysis is relevant here. When we cognize the presence of an object, we say we are conscious of the object. Leaving aside the physical instruments of perception, logically we can come to the conclusion, that it is not just the eyes or the mind or the brain that cognizes, but deeper within, there is our consciousness without which we could not be conscious of any-thing. But now suppose you walk into a totally dark room. What are you conscious of, now? You are not conscious of anything. You might say that because it is dark you are not able to see anything, and so you are not conscious of anything. But you are conscious of the fact that you are not able to see anything, because of the darkness. In other words, you are conscious of darkness. The point of it all is that consciousness is never absent in you. One may say that during deep sleep one is not conscious. But after waking up one remembers he was asleep. If the consciousness was not present during sleep one will not remember that he had the enjoyment of sleep.

That is why the scriptures cry hoarse: The Self is Consciousness. Because, after all the other things have been negated as transient, that one thing has to remain.

The three words Real, Consciousness and Infinite all refer to one and the same thing, namely *Brahman*. When qualified by the three epithets, *Brahman* is distinguished from everything else. The words distinguish *Brahman* from all unreal, insentient and finite things. Whatever is absolutely real exists in the past, in the present, and in the future. All things which have *vikAras* are unreal.

vacArambhaNam vikAro nAmadheyam, mRttiketyeva satyam,

says the *Ch.U.*, meaning: all that changes form is only a name and a creation of speech; what is clay is alone real. Here the analogy of the context is that of the pot made of clay. The pot has only name and form; it is the clay that is relatively real. In the analogy of the rope and snake, it is the rope that is relatively real. That thing is unreal which deviates from its form; so, the snake and the pot are unreal. The universe is unreal because it is subject to deviation. In general what arises from something else has no status of absolute reality. So always the cause is relatively real and the effect is unreal. The universe is an effect, therefore it is unreal.It is only an empirical reality. It is certainly more real than the

phenomenal reality of the dream. But even the universe is not absolutely real since it is subsumed in a still higher experience. In the same way the five sheaths that 'cover' the Self are not absolutely real. That is why their negation is necessary to become and be, the Self within. When the fundamental unity of the Self with *Brahman* is realized, the world of our waking moments is submerged. So *Brahman*-consciousness is of a higher order of reality. There is no higher reality beyond that because it is Pure Consciousness. Absence of Consciousness is a contradiction in terms. The very knowledge of absence of consciousness implies the existence of consciousness. This highest intuition, which should not be called consciousness of the Absolute, is Consciousness itself. This is the '*jnAna*' occurring in the definition of *Brahman*.

Brahman is the ultimate Cause. But It is not like clay being the cause for the pot. Clay is insentient, but *Brahman* is not. That is why the scripture says, *Brahman* is Consciousness. Because Consciousness alone is absolutely real. Insentient matter is real only from the standpoint of worldly experience. The word '*jnAna*' which is used here to define *Brahman* along with the adjuncts 'real' and 'infinite', usually arises in the context of the knower, the object known, or the instrument of knowledge or the act of knowing. The knower is the agent of the act of knowing and so he undergoes a *vikAra* in the very act of knowing. If *Brahman* were *the knower* he would be other than what is known and so cannot be infinite. *Brahman* cannot also be *the object known* for the same reason. Thus *Brahman* has to be defined only in terms of Knowledge, Consciousness, pure and simple - just as it is Existence, pure and simple. Ordinarily knowledge or consciousness means that through which something is known or shines forth. But here in the definition of *Brahman* it has to mean knowledge itself . It denotes the very consciousness on which is based the entire process of knowing along with the concepts of knower and known. This Consciousness is not material and therefore it is limitless and infinite. The word 'infinite' denies all limitation of space, time and causation. The words 'real' and 'consciousness' not only deny the opposite of these words but also have positive connotations of 'unfailing existence' and 'self-luminous knowledge of objects' - as was remarked in the instance of our understanding darkness of a dark room.

Question: Is it not illogical to talk about a pure contentless consciousness?

No. This is the crux of the matter. In *Advaita Vedanta,* a book by M.K. Venkatrama Iyer, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, there is a beautiful presentation of a possible answer to this question. Take an illustration from the fine arts. From architecture to sculpture, from sculpture to painting, from painting to poetry, from poetry to music, there is a gradual transition from a situation of content-domination to one of form-domination. In architecture brick and mortar occupy a very prominent place. This prominence recedes into the background when the sculptor with his chisel produces a whole saga out of just one piece of stone. In painting there is very little physical content, but there is a substantial amount of form that predominates. In poetry, by mere words one brings a whole bundle of meanings, emotions and expressions. Here matter or content is at its lowest and form takes over almost fully. But when we go over to music, there are not even words. By the mere form of music we are enraptured into whatever emotion the composer has designed for us. Music is pure form with no material content. If this can

happen in art, it can also happen in the description of the reality behind the universe, where, as we advance in spiritual evolution, we pass to higher and higher states of consciousness. Starting from the waking state of consciousness in which we are so full of content that even the consciousness behind it is hidden, we go step by step until we reach the stage where there is no matter but only pure spirit, pure consciousness. Twentieth century Physics tells us that our consciousness is in some intricate way mixed up with the external world. Vedanta declares that there is no mixing up, in the sense that there is only consciousness. There is not even a subject and an object.

Question: When the subject and object disappear, are we not left with a complete blank?

No. It is an error to think that when the series of presentations to consciousness come to an end, there is nothing left behind. Even the statement that there is nothing left behind is a piece of knowledge, presupposing consciousness. The reminiscent experience that we slept well the previous night and did not know anything about what went on when we slept, would not be possible if the state of deep sleep were a complete blank. While everything is presented to consciousness and is revealed by it, consciousness itself is not presented to anything else. It is never an object in relation to a subject. It is that which underlies both subject and object and can manifest itself without any aid. This is the Ultimate Reality which sages experience in the state of *nirvikalpa-samAdhi,* when they have left everything far behind. One can deny everything external to oneself but one cannot deny one's own self. Consciousness is the Self. (Also see Shloka No.5 of the Section 'The Hymn to the Guru of all Gurus' in the Chapter 'The Guru').

Hence it is that the Lord is addressed as '*jnAna-svarUpa*' and '*satya-svarUpa*'. He is also '*Ananda-svarUpa*' because of His infiniteness. '*Ananda*' is bliss and '*ananta*' is infinity. What is total bliss has only to be infinite, it cannot have any limitation. What is finite cannot be happiness or bliss. What is infinite can have neither a beginning nor an end. Our Ignorance is beginningless, but it will have an end, when we get Self-Realization. Thus *Brahman* is *satyam* or *sat; Brahman* is *jnAnam* or *cit;* and *Brahman* is *anantam* or *Ananda.* Its *svarUpa,* 'form' as It is, is *sat-cid-Ananda* which is the same thing as *satyam-jnAnam-anantaM.*

In sum there are five and only five concepts that matter; they are:

sat, cit, Ananda, nAma and *rUpa*.

The first three are absolutely real and they are only one, namely *Brahman.* The last two take care of all the universe, and the knowledge of it by science and other means; they are real only so long as we are not AWARE of the absoluteness of the Absolute.

3. From the Upanishads

Of the 120 or so Upanishads which are extant, about twelve are considered to be major Upanishads. Almost every religious teacher has commented on most of these major Upanishads. They are all discourses and dialogues on spiritual experiences and pursuits.

Long or short, in prose or poetry, they are expositions and theses on fundamental questions transcending the phenomenal realities of day-to-day life. However, the one under-current of everything in the Upanishads would seem to be the concept of one Godhead, amidst the plethora of names and forms that confront us in nature as well as in the mental universe in each one of us. The word '*Brahman*' is used by the Upanishads to refer to this absolute Reality. It pervades everything animate and inanimate. It is the One and only One intangible power behind all tangible forces. It is the vast boundless ocean of which everything that is experienced is only a wave. Everything that is perceptible to the senses, including the feeling of I-ness of each human being is only a fragment of that wave. We are implored by the Upanishads in all earnestness to delve beneath the names and forms of the outside world and seek the peaceful Infinite within. Agitation and perturbation are only on the surface of this Ocean of Bliss.

It is certainly elementary to say that God is everywhere. To children we narrate the story of Prahlada from the *BhA.* on the manifestation of the Almighty God as nara-simha (= man-lion-combination) in a pillar. We think that this convinces the child (and us!) that God is everywhere. But to a spiritual seeker the Upanishads declare that more is true. God is not only everywhere, but in addition, there is nothing but God everywhere. This implication of the Upanishadic teaching is missed by all but the true Seer. To say that there is nothing but God, means we must be able to see God, Godliness and Godhead in everything that we see. When a wooden replica of, say, a horse, is seen the child sees only the horse, but the experienced adult should be able to see the wood 'behind' the horse, inspite of the horse that stares us in the face. The Seer, says the Upanishads, sees only the Self (=*Atman*, which is the immanent Reality in everything). For him, the plurality of the universe is only an outward appearance, like the waves in the ocean. This *sama-dRSTi* (= equanimous vision) is the goal of all teaching in the Upanishads. To bring home this point the rishis of the Upanishads get into elaborate dialectical arguments, competitive discourses, provocative dialogues, revealing reminiscences of spiritual experiences, descriptions of tentative conclusions after initial experimentations, numerous questions and varied answers to each of them, meditative searches after truth, joyous declarations of the Ultimate Wisdom and last of all, very involved comparisons and analogies some of them very complicated and involved as to defy our understanding and some of them as elementary as may verge on the naïve. All this constitutes the ICEBERG we referred to earlier. However much we may write about it we shall still be floating only on the TIP! It is the experience that is the Iceberg!

The Seers of the Upanishads employ several techniques to give us the message. In the 7th chapter of the *Ch.U.* the divine sage Narada goes to Sanatkumara, one of the four most enlightened sons of Brahma the Creator, born out of His will, and asks for spiritual enlightenment. Sanatkumara bids Narada to tell him what he knows already. The latter gives a long list of the names of all the arts and sciences that he has learnt. Starting from the four vedas, then the *vedAngas*, the various *SAstras*, Narada in one breath lists all of them and concludes by saying that inspite of all this knowledge he has not learnt about the Ultimate Truth. All this is only a name, says Sanatkumara. 'Meditate on the name; he who meditates on Name as *Brahman* becomes independent. 'Is there anything greater than Name?' asks Narada. Yes, there is Speech and Sanatkumara elaborates on Speech as

the Ultimate. Is there anything greater than Speech? Yes, there is Mind. Then there is Will, then Thought, then Contemplation, then Understanding, Strength, Food, Water, Heat, Space, Memory, Hope, Prana the Life-principle. Thus Narada is led on step by step to subtler and subtler principles. Narada does not ask whether there is anything greater than *prANa* the life-principle. But Sanatkumara leads him on to further to *satya* (Truth), then *vijnAna* (Knowledge with Experience), *SraddhA* (Faith), Steadfastness, Activity, Happiness and then to the Infinite. Says Sanatkumara: What is Infinite is happy. There is no happiness in the Finite. And then comes a most profound declaration from Sanatkumara: Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, is aware of nothing else, that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, is aware of something else, that is the Finite. The Infinite is immortal while the Finite is mortal. (*Ch.U.* 7.24.1). In other words, the Ultimate is non-dual. Any presence or awareness of duality makes the awareness finite. The Infinite (*bhUmA*) is the fullest expression and manifestation of the Absolute Reality. That is everywhere. That is above, that is below, that is in front of you, behind you. That is *Atman*, the immanent Reality. That is *Brahman*, the Transcendent Reality. What you see before you physically, is not *Brahman*, but what makes you see is *Brahman*. Ke.U. 1 – 4, says, 'It cannot be heard by your ears, because it is what makes you hear. It cannot be thought of as an object of thought by your mind, but it is what makes your mind think'. Such profound descriptions abound everywhere in the Upanishads.

The Upanishad known as *bRhad-AraNyaka, shortly,* Br.U. is in fact the largest Upanishad. Its third chapter describes a seminar-like discussion in the assembly of the great Janaka, wherein Yajnavalkya comes out the victor. Arrayed against him are stalwarts like Uddalaka, Aswala, Arthabaga, Ushastha and many more. The occasion itself constitutes an interesting anecdote. King Janaka had invited all these *brahma-vAdins* (speakers and researchers about the Absolute) for a *yajna*, provokes them into a discussion by announcing that he has earmarked one thousand cows, each with a bag of ten gold coins and all these constitute the prize for the one among them who is '*anUcAnatamaH*' (meaning, the most erudite in vedas and *vedAngas*. The entire assembly is stunned at this announcement, stupefied by the challenge of the occasion and the seriousness it demanded and kept silent. But after a little period of silence, Yajnavalkya rises up and with his assistant makes preparations to take possession of the cows. Then it is that the assembled scholars begin to challenge him one by one. Each one asks him a few questions about the subtleties of the Knowledge about the Absolute. Yajnavalkya shoots forth his answers without any hesitation or confusion and with such clarity that they withdraw their challenge and sit down. Finally one lady, Vacaknavi Gargi, announces that she is going to ask just two questions of Yajnavalkya and if he answers them well, there should be no more doubt about who carries the day.

'That of which they say it is above the heaven and below the earth, which is between heaven and earth as well, and which was, is and shall be – tell me, Yajnavalkya, in what it is woven, warp and woof?'

In space (=*AkASa*), replies Yajnavalkya. 'And in what, is this *AkaSa* woven, warp and woof?' shoots back Vacaknavi Gargi. The answer (*bRhad-AraNyaka-Upanishad* 3.8.8) of

Yajnavalkya to this profound question is one of the most famous passages in all of Upanishadic literature and should be engraved in letters of gold at all spiritual centres of the world:

> 'The Seers, O Gargi, call Him akshara, the Imperishable Reality. He is neither gross nor fine, neither short nor long, neither hot nor cold, neither light nor dark, neither of the nature of air, nor of space. He is without relations, without taste or smell, without eyes, ears, speech, mind, vigour, breath, mouth; he is without measure, without inside or outside. He experiences nothing and nothing experiences him.'

> *Etad-vai tad-aksharaM gArgi brAhmaNA abhivadanti asthUlaM anaNu ahrasvaM adIrghaM alOhitaM asnehaM acchAyaM atamaH avAyu anAkASaM asangaM arasaM agandhaM acakshushkaM aSrotraM avAk amanaH atejaskaM aprANam amukhaM amAtraM anantaraM abAhyaM na tad-aSnAti kimcana na tad-aSnAti kaScana //*

In another context in the same Upanishad, the same Yajnavalkya explains all this to his Maitreyi more elaborately. The conversation in Br.U. 1.2.4 is on the non-duality of the *Atman* :

It is – as from a lighted fire, kindled with damp fuel, various clouds of smoke arise, even so, my dear, from this Great Being have issued forth what we have as Rg Veda, yajur-veda, sAma-veda, AtharvAngirasa, history, legends, arts, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms, glosses and commentaries. From Him indeed are all these breathed forth.

It is – as of all waters the ocean is the centre , as of all kinds of touch the skin is the centre, as of all smells the nose is the centre, as of all tastes the tongue is the centre, as of all sounds the ear is the centre, as of all intentions the mind is the centre, as of all arts the heart is the centre, as of all actions the hands are the centre, as of all movements the feet are the centre, as of all the vedas the speech is the centre.

It is – as a lump of salt thrown into water becomes dissolved into water and could not be seized again, but wherever one takes the water one tastes salt, even so, my dear, this great Being, infinite and boundless, is only a mass of consciousness. It emerges from these elements and vanishes again with them. When it is gone, there is no more (individual) consciousness. This is what I say, my dear. Thus spoke Yajnavalkya.

Then Maitreyi said: 'Here you have bewildered me, Sir, by saying that when he is gone there is no more consciousness'.

Yajnavalkya replied, 'Surely, I am not saying anything bewildering. It is wisdom enough, my dear. For when there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one understands another. But when everything has become the Self, then by what and whom should one hear, by what and to whom should one speak, by what and of whom should one think, and by what and whom should one understand? By what should one know that by which all this is known? By what, my dear, should one know the knower?'

How then, does one realise that? Yes, the comprehension is certainly difficult. But by internal self-discipline one can reach that state of self-realisation in this very life itself, assures Lord Yama, the God of Death, in the Ka.U., in his very lucid presentation to young Naciketas. The latter as a boy is watching his father give away all his wealth and possessions and out of sheer curiosity asks: To whom, dear father, are you going to give me? Irritated by repetitions of the same question from the boy, the father, in a bad mood, replies, 'To Yama, the God of Death'! The boy accordingly goes to the world of Yama, waits for three days before he gets to see the Lord and in return for his waiting patiently is given three boons of his choice. By the first the boy asks for the appeasement of his father's anger on his return to Earth; by the second he seeks to know about the ritual sacrifices that Yama performed to attain the status of the God of Death. Both are easily granted. By his third request the young boy clean bowls the Lord of Death, for he seeks to know about the secret of after-life, i.e. the secret of life after death. Yama is embarassed and tries to dissuade the boy, by offering him, instead, all the riches and sensual pleasures of the Earth. But the boy refuses and steadfastly asks only for the Ultimate Wisdom. It is then that Yama elaborates the science of brahma-*vidyA* (the knowledge about *Brahman*). The ensuing chapters of Ka.U. constitute the most poetical, at the same time most lucid presentation of the knowledge of *Brahman*-cum-*Atman*, the summum bonum of all the Upanishads.

Question: What does all this mean to the layman of the modern world?

It is this. Every religion says that man should behave in a noble way with compassion, love and sympathy and should spread happiness everywhere. The Upanishads add a punch line to this and say: Man should behave in a divine way *because* his essential nature is divine. The animal instincts that he usually exhibits are the ones acquired by him through his thoughts and deeds in his several lives. But if he is himself, he can conquer these lower tendencies in him and bring out his natural divine instinct in him which will prompt him to love to be happy and to revel in that Inner Glory of the inherent Divinity in Him. Therefore, say the Upanishads: Don't seek happiness from outside. Be yourself, turn to the *Atman*, see the same *Atman* in every other self. And that way see the same positives and not the negatives of every other self. If only we set our mind to do this the Lord will help us; because, the Lord resides in us. He is not an absentee landlord; He is working with us all the time. This is the fundamental guideline of the Upanishads for practical living.

It is necessary here to record the flexibility and frankness exhibited by the Upanishadic seers. The knowledge of *Brahman-Atman* elucidated in these ancient texts is of course a declaration of the great sages who 'saw it all'. But they never say it as a dogma. Nor are we supposed to receive them as dogmatic assertions. The beauty of their teaching is that they ask you to enquire within yourself and arrive at your own conclusions, step by step, checking with the Upanishadic revelations at each step. To help you in this search after truth they give you their intermediate conclusions also. The final conclusion, according to them, is a realisable truth, which forms therefore an axiom – a single axiom from which the entire science of vedanta and metaphysics is built up by accepted forms of logic. This

single axiom is enunciated in four different ways in the vedas. These are the four Grand Pronouncements (= *mahA-vAkyas*):

praJAnaM Brahma – *Rgveda,* A.U.*, 5.3*
aham Brahma asmi – *yajurveda,* Br.U.*, 1.4.10,*
tat tvam asi – *sAmaveda,* Ch.U.*, 6.9.4,*
ayam AtmA Brahma – *atharva veda,* Ma.U.- *2*

meaning, respectively

Absolute Consciousness is *Brahman*;
I am *Brahman*;
Thou art That;
This *Atman* is *Brahman.*

Each of these pronouncements is subjected to an intensive analysis by the commentators belonging to each school of philosophy. However the differences in the interpretations by the different *AcAryas* should not matter in one's daily life. It is as if there exists a multidimensional Reality of which each individual perception has only an one-dimensional projection of the Reality before it, and, perhaps, each in a dimensional axis. You are free to choose that one which is appropriate to your taste, evolution, training and tradition.

Before we bring this discussion on the Upanishads to a close we should talk about the mystic syllable *oM* which is most important for the religious and spiritual pursuit by a Hindu. Without an explanation and study of this word no understanding of Hinduism can be complete. The word consists of a triad of three sounds (*mAtrA*s) , namely the syllable '*a*' (as the 'u' in 'but'), the syllable '*u*' (as the 'u' in 'put') and the syllable '*ma*'. This is why many texts using this word use the spelling '*aum*' thus emphasizing the three *mAtrA*s which make up the word *oM*. The term *mAtrA* is used for the upper limb of the *nAgari* characters and a syllabic instant in prosody. The esoteric significance of these three *mAtrA*s and the myriads of connotations that they stand for are the subject matter of many a passage in the Upanishads, the *Gita* and other scriptures. In fact, a whole Upanishad (though a very small one), namely, M.U., devotes itself entirely to the explanation of the word *oM*. The Upanishad, for this very reason, has been termed the quintessance of vedanta. If a person cannot study all the hundred and odd Upanishads, it will be enough, it is so declared in the *muktikopanishad*, if he reads the one Upanishad of *mANDUkya*. The first extant commentary on this Upanishad was written by Gaudapada, before the time of Shankara and this commentary called *mANDUkya-kArikA* is still the earliest known systematic exposition of the advaita point of view of vedanta. Its importance can be gauged by the fact that when Shankara wrote his commentary on the *mANDUkyopanishad*, as he did for ten other Upanishads, he merged the *kArikA* of Gaudapada with the Upanishad and wrote a commentary on the *kArikA* also.

The word *oM* is spoken of as the primeval word which stands for the entire universe permeated by *Brahman* and therefore *Brahman* itself. The three sounds that go tomake up

oM constitute, symbolically, the entire universe of words. For '*a*' is the syllable with which one opens the mouth to speak any word and '*u'* is the syllable which allows the tongue all positions from the palate to the lips and '*m*' is the vocal movement one makes to close the lips. Every sound which man can produce is between the extremes of '*a*' and *'m'* and so, together with the intermediate stage of '*u*' it represents everything words may represent.

Esoterically, the '*a*' stands for the first stage of wakefulness, where we experience in our gross body the totality of external experiences through our mind and sense organs. The '*u*' stands for the dream state of sleep in which mental experiences are available, though erratically, by the mind which is the only thing awake, without the help of the external sense organs or the presence of the rationalizing intellect. The two kinds of experience, namely those of the waking state and of the dreaming state , contradict each other, in the sense that a man may experience hunger in a dream though he might have eaten in the waking state a few minutes earlier. In the state of deep sleep, represented by the sound '*m*' there is no consciousness of any experience; even the mind has gone to sleep. But still there is an awareness after the deep sleep is over that one has been sleeping and that one was conscious of nothing. The *mANDUkyopanishad* says that in the state of deep sleep the *Atman* which is always present, was witness to the sleep of the body and since *Atman* is nothing but Consciousness, one was conscious of the state of Ignorance arising from deep sleep. It is this cognizance of Ignorance that makes us say, after the sleep is over, that 'I was sleeping, totally oblivious of anything'. It is the *Atman* which is present in the three states of consciousness, and also in the state beyond the three states, namely the *turIya* (= fourth) state, i.e., the state corresponding to the silence that ensues after one has steadily pronounced *oM*. It is the state of no *mAtrA*, that is, *amAtrA*. In that state of silence consciousness alone is present and there is nothing else and therefore nothing to be cognized or conscious of. So when we recite the mystic syllable *oM*, we are advised to meditate on this common substratum of all the three states of experience, and during the silence that follows, merge in the Consciousness that alone persists as a substratum. That Consciousness is the *Atman* or *Brahman*.

This is the symbolism behind the repeated insistence of the Upanishads that the word *oM* is the supreme prop (*Alambana*) to reach *Brahman*, it is the one thing which is talked about by all the vedas and it is for this alone that the sages do penance and undergo austerities. It represents both the *Brahman* with attributes and the *Brahman* without attributes. It is a reminder of our true state of Being. Hence it is that the word *oM* is recited at the beginning and conclusion of every religious reading or prayer. It indicates that we emanate from *Brahman* and finally dissolve into *Brahman*. The soul which leaves the body in the midst of conscious *oM* recitation is said to merge into *Brahman* itself, that is, attain *mokSa*. Meditation on the word is recommended for the yogi as a direct path to realisation. As the generality of human beings cannot realise the ultimate reality which is beyond all categories of time, space and causation, the *mAnDUkyopanishad* and its commentator, Gaudapada recommend the contemplation of the three sound symbols as the three states of man's totality of experiences, and thus, analysing one's experience, the student endowed with the mental and moral qualifications requiring for the understanding of vedanta, is helped to rech ultimate reality. Specifically, if one identifies the *amAtra*

state of silence with the fourth state of experience and meditates on it without intermission, one realises one's Self and 'there is no return for him to the sphere of empirical life'.

4. Difference and Non-difference

While the **three major schools of philosophy** in Hindu tradition agree that the Absolute Transcendental Supreme is ever-present, all-knowing and all-powerful, in relation to God or the Ultimate, the nature of the Soul and the Universe is differently interpreted by the three schools.

The *advaita* school says there is only one Absolute Reality. Soul and Universe are ultimately the same as the essential Divinity, that is called *Brahman* in the Upanishads. It is infinite in its presence, infinite in its consciousness and infinite in bliss. The Universe is only an appearance, superimposed on the Transcendent Reality. The Soul has an individual existence only so long as it is wrapped up in ignorance of its identity and therefore, a total merging of the Soul with *Brahman*. What appears as the external Universe is only a phenomenon born out of ignorance, a beginningless ignorance which ends when the release (= *moksha*) takes place. The plurality that we perceive during our period of Ignorance is only an apparent plurality. If that is taken as real then it is impossible to reconcile the experience of the sages with such a creed; because in that case Deliverance from *samsAra* (= the cycle of births and deaths) would have a beginning and then there is the inevitable consequence that such a deliverance must also have an end!

The *viSishTAdvaita* school led by Ramanuja says the Soul and Universe are only parts of the Absolute God. The relationship of God to the Soul and the Universe is like the relationship of the Soul of man to the body of man. Individual souls are therefore only parts of *Brahman*. God, Soul and Universe together form an inseparable unity which is one and has no second. Matter and Souls inhere in that Ultimate Reality as attributes to a substance. *Cit* (souls) and *acit* (matter) are only the body of God. So though there is difference from God, this difference is subordinate to the non-difference. Creation is a real act of God. It is the expansion of intelligence. Matter is fundamentally real and undergoes real revelation. The Soul is a higher mode than matter, because it is conscious. It is also eternally real and eternally distinct. Final release is a communion with God. Individual Souls retain their separate identities even after *moksha.* They live in fellowship with God either serving Him or meditating on Him.

The ***dvaita*** school led by Madhwa says that God, Soul and Universe are three mutually and fundamentally different categories, each having a separate reality, though the latter two are dependent on the former. However, God controls them. God's Grace is necessary for the liberation of the Soul. God is only the Agent. He causes the universe to be born and controls it. But He is not its material cause. Five differences are absolute: God and Soul; Soul and Soul; God and Matter; Soul and Matter; Matter and Matter. Each Soul is essentially different and belongs to different grace, even in its enjoyment of bliss after *moksha*. The philosophy is one of down-to-earth realism. Vyasaraja, one of the

triumvirate-giants of this school-- the other two being Madhwa and Jayatirtha - summarises the entire philosophy in a set of nine points:

Lord Narayana is possessed of countless qualities, is devoid of all blemish and is an independent Reality. He creates and sustains the world. He is the One who grants *moksha* to pious souls; The universe is real. There is a five-fold difference. Souls are dependent on God. All souls are not alike. Moksha is a state of existence when the soul enjoys eternal bliss; the only way to reach that state is Devotion. The Lord can be only known through Scriptures.

Delving deep into the three schools academically, one finds that the distinguishing characteristics of the three schools may be classified in terms of the three fundamental concepts of the idea of Difference (= *bheda*):

SAJATIYA-BHEDA. **Difference within the same category . For instance, within the category of trees there are apple trees and there are lemon trees. This difference that exists among trees in the category of all trees is *sajAtIya-bheda*. Such a difference does not exist in the category of *Brahman*, the Absolute Reality. In other words, *Brahman* is unique in its category. There is no second *Brahman*. On this point the three major schools of vedanta agree. All of them say *Brahman* is unique in itself. In *Brahman*, there is no *sajAtIya-bheda*.**

VIJATIYA-BHEDA **Inter-category Difference For instance, there is the category of trees and there is the category of hills. Trees and hills belong to different categories. Such an inter-category difference does not exist with respect to *Brahman*, say both Shankara and Ramanuja. There is only one category, *Brahman* and everything is *Brahman*, says Shankara. And Ramanuja says: there is only one category, *Brahman* and everything else is a part of it. But Madhwa maintains that the category of individual souls and the category of universe are categories different from *Brahman* and so, even from the absolute point of view there is inter-category difference; and, further,this distinction between categories is absolute and unqualified. For Madhwa's school the souls and the universe are essentially different and distinct from *Brahman*.**

SVAGATA-BHEDA **Difference of the entity within itself. Within a tree, there are branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, etc. These are by themselves different from the tree though together they all make the tree. The tree is therefore said to have *svagata-bheda*. According to Shankara's reading of the Upanishads, *Brahman* does not have even this difference within itself. It is whole, without parts, bereft of attributes and distinctions. Ramanuja as well as Madhwa differ from this. All the three agree that *Brahman* is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. But Shankara says these three refer to one and the same undiversified attributeless *brahma*n, because they are idential in essence and each one of them is a definition and not a qualification of *Brahman*. The other two schools opine these are the three essential features of *Brahman* who is therefore possessed of attributes and distinctions.**

To sum up, we may state the same in terms of a concept of non-difference. As far as God, Souls and Universe are concerned, Shankara says there is non-difference of all the three varieties. Ramanuja and Madhwa both agree with Shankara on the *sajAtIya* non-difference, meaning thereby that there is no such thing as a second *Brahman*. However Madhwa asserts that the other two kinds of difference persist. However, between Shankara and Ramanuja there is agreement on two types of non-difference. Their only difference is on the *svagata-bheda*. Within God there is a soul-body relationship between God and the Universe of Matter and Souls and therefore there is *svagata-bheda* in *Brahman* according to Ramanuja. But Shankara and Ramanuja both agree that Matter emanated from *Brahman* as is declared in statements like 'That itself manifested itself' (= *tad AtmAnaM svayaM akuruta* -- *taittirIya upanishad* II - 7). The universe is only a modification of *Brahman*, in both the *advaita* and *viSisTAdvaita* philosophies; **but hold on, there is a crucial difference between the two viewpoints.**

The ***advaita*** view says that the modification is only **apparent**, while the ***viSishTAdvaita*** view says that the modification is **real**!

To use another metaphor from the modern world of technology, ***advaita*** says that the modified appearance of *Brahman* as the universe is a **projection like a movie** and therefore comparatively unreal, while the ***viSishTadvaita*** view says that the modification is **an actual play on the stage** and therefore real!

What matters is not how the three Masters differ on the facets of difference and non-difference among the three entities: God, Souls and Universe; what matters is **the non-difference in their teaching to humanity in regard to what one has to do in the daily world.** It is interesting to note at this point that to whatever school a noted saint or devotee belongs his prayers or compositions always include the thought that whatever birth he may have to take in the future, whatever number of times he may have to be born in the future, his only prayer is that he should not forget the name of God. **The unity of**

Indian culture should be seen in such common characteristic prayers. Every saint would say that our needs and desires are endless and so in our prayers to God we must not seek anything except devotion to Him. In fact this is why Hindu religion is one in spite of all the differences in the interpretations of scriptures. Any attempt to sort out these differences at an intellectual level may become just an exercise in futility. Well might one echo with Jagad*guru* ShankarAchArya of Sringeri: *'You cannot see the feet of the Lord, why do you waste time debating about the nature of His face?'* The very nature of the literature of the Upanishads does not allow one unique interpretation. The Upanishads, as we know, are collections of free candid and detailed discussions between teacher and disciple and it is for the reader to draw his or her own conclusion after assimilating the analysis thus presented and in the light of one's own spiritual experience. It is here that the great *AcAryas* help. Even to understand them one will need the physical presence of a *guru*. It is therefore not fair to expect the Upanishads to tell us whether this is right or that is worng. To follow one of these masters with single-minded faith and try to understand that master and his perception of what the Upanishads say might itself occupy a whole life-time. For the ordinary busy intelligent layman of the modern world, it will become a crisis of intellect to ask questions like:

Is the *advaita* of Shankara the correct interpretation of the Upanishads or not? Is not the *viSishTAdvaita* explanation of Ramanuja the ultimate answer? **Which of the three great Masters has the correct philosophy applicable to our daily life? To which of the statements in the Upanishads shall we give importance or dominance?** To the statements that are obviously absolutist, as recommended by Shankara? Or to those that are obviously non-absolutist as recommended by Madhwa and Ramanuja?

Such differences in interpretation has generated a succession of philosophical literature by later thinkers and writers and the body of literature on both sides is nothing but voluminous. Instead of trying to arbitrate among the great Masters, we should only aim to understand one of them in as much fullness as possible**. This one Master may be chosen, as per one's tradition, taste, attitudes and upbringing**. In saying this we certainly invite the criticism that Hinduism is *too* tolerant. But**, is there something like too rich a man or too beautiful a woman?**

CHAPTER 7: GEMS FROM SHRIMAD-BHAGAVATAM.

Note: In this chapter, all references are to Shrimad Bhagavatam unless otherwise indicated.

1. Kapila Gita

Kapila Muni, teaching Vedanta to his own mother Devahuti at her request, starts from rock-bottom fundamentals. It is the mind that is the villain of the piece. Both for the bondage of the *JIva* and for its release from bondage, it is the mind that is responsible. When the mind attaches itself to sense objects, bondage arises. On the other hand if mind attaches itself to the Lord, it becomes the cause for the Release. The self-centred thoughts of 'I' and 'Mine' give rise to the vices of desire and greed. When these dirts are washed off from the mind, it becomes pure. The word used here (III – 25 – 16) is '*kAma-lobhAdibhir-malaiH'*. Desire and Greed are called '*malaM*'. The latter means 'faeces' as also 'dirt'. No one wants to identify himself with the 'faeces'. So also one should stay away from the '*malaM*' of desire and greed. Mind should be in its own pure state. Anything that is foreign to it should not be there. Any thought of an object is foreign to it. What is foreign to it is '*malaM*. When it is rid of all that '*malaM*', in that state, says the Rishi, mind has none of the mundane misery or happiness. That is when man sees his own *prakRti* powerless. That is when he has transcended the effects of *prakRti*. He then sees no difference, no second, no relationship to anything or anyone. There is no place in space where he is not already there. It is in that mind the Absolute reflects itself. And there is no other way to achieve this than to have association with *sAdhus*. See Na. *Shloka* 91-4 (in the chapter 'Speak to God through Prayers'). Also see the Section 'Shankara's Message of Oneness' in the chapter 'The Guru'.

When a holy association is there, first we get *shraddhA* in the spiritual quest, then enthusiasm for the same and then *bhakti* towards the Lord. "*shraddhA ratir-bhaktir-anukramishhyati"* (III – 25 – 25). It is the association with the holy that will generate, through the continuous contemplation of My glories, a distaste for sense gratification here and hereafter.

bhaktyA pumAn jAta-virAga aindriyAt
dRRiShTa-shrutAn mad-rachanAnucintayA (III – 25 – 26).

For devotees who are attached to devotional service even *moksha* is not more attractive. I am their loved one like their soul, friendly like their son, trusted confidante like their friend, mentor like their *guru* and respected like their favourite God. Their minds are always fixed on me. This is all that is needed for *mukti*. (See here Shloka #5 of Dhruva Stuti in the section bearing that name).

In order to attain this *mukti*, one should desist from the mundane distractions of *prakRti*. The knowledge of the Self is the ultimate cure for removal of Ignorance that binds the heart to the world of *prakRti*. What is the Self? III -26-3 explains:

> The Self or the *Purusha* is the One who has pervaded the entire universe. He is attributeless. He is beyond the *prakRti*. He dwells in every *antah-karaNa* (Inner Organ). He shines by Himself. He is beginningless, sourceless.
> *anAdir-AtmA PurushaH nirguNaH prakRRitaiH paraH /*
> *pratyag-dhAmA svayamjyotiH vishvaM yena samanvitaM //*

Wise men attribute to *prakRti* the relationship of Cause and Effect as well as the agency of action. And they point to the *Purusha*, that transcends the *prakRti*, as the cause of enjoyership of happiness and unhappiness.

The five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air and space), the five subtle elements (sound, touch, form, taste and smell),the four internal senses (manas, *chit*tam, buddhi and ahamkAra – receiver-mind, storer-mind, analyser-mind and ego), the five senses of knowledge and the five senses of action these twenty four -- constitute the *prakRti* or the manifested stage of existence, also called the qualified presence of *Brahman* – sagunasya brahmaNaH sanniveshaH (III – 26 – 15). Time is the twenty-fifth element. What is manifested as Time outside is the *Purusha* within. (III – 26 – 18).

That is why, in common parlance in India, the statements

'It is divine will' and 'It is the work of Time'

are interchangeably used.

Even though the *Purusha* is situated in the *prakRti* (the body envelopment) He is devoid of all attributes, He is unchanging and He has no claim to doership. So he is not touched by any of the GuNas (modes) of *prakRti*. On the other hand when He slips from this state and identifies with the GuNas, then overcome by the Ego, he thinks he is the doer. And this involves him in the samsAra of births and deaths. (III – 27 – 1 to 3). Such a *JIva* overcome by the guNas has to come out of it by a self-analysis. And here the Acharya Kapila gives a powerful analogy. (III – 27 – 12, 13) :

> *yathA jalastha AbhAsaH sthalasthenA-vadRRishyate /*
> *svAbhAsena tathA sUryo jalasthena divi sthitaH //*
> *evaM trivRRid-ahaMkAro bhUtendriya-manomayaiH /*
> *svAbhAsair-lakShito'nena sadAbhAsena satya-dRRik //*

The presence of the Supreme Lord can be realized just as the sun is realized first as a reflection on water, and again as a second reflection on the wall of a room, although the sun itself is situated in the sky. The self-realized soul is thus reflected first in the threefold ego and then in the body, senses and mind.

An explanation is necessary for this analogy. The topic is how one recognises that the Supreme is the One Power behind every action and every presence in the universe. Imagine a room in which there is a large vessel of water that receives direct sunlight and reflects it onto the opposite wall in the room. What is the source of this light on the wall? It is the reflected Sun in the water (contained in the vessel). And what is the source of that reflected Sun? The actual Sun in the blazing sky. So also we individuals seem to be having awareness of the outside world. The source of our awareness is our consciousness within. But this consciousness itself is a reflection of the real supreme Consciousness, the reflection being in our own ego-mind.

Now Kapila continues this thought process to its logical conclusion. Our mind goes to sleep when we experience dreamless sleep. In fact, all the senses of perception, cognition and action seem to have disappeared during our sleep. Where have they gone? They have all merged in our own Ignorance. That is why we are totally unaware of anything at that time. But there is the "I" part, which is not sleeping. It never sleeps. The "I" is always existing. But it is bereft of the thought of "I"-hood. That is, it is without egoism (*nir-aham-kriyaH*). It is in fact the only witness to everything that is happening around it. It sees everything go to sleep – the body, the senses, the mind and even the egoism. So the egoism is lost. But It itself (the "I") is not lost. *When the "I"-hood is absent it may look as though the self is dissolved. But this view is as false as thinking that a man who has been robbed of his wealth is destroyed.* (III – 27 – 15):

manyamAnas-tadAtmAnaM anashTo nashTavan-mRshA /
nashTe ahamkaraNe drashTA nashTavitta ivAturaH //

After elaborately detailing the process by which *PrakRti* produces the manifold of this material universe, Kapila takes up the topic of *yoga-sAdhanA*. First he details the prerequisites such as execution of prescribed duties, avoidance of prohibited actions, satisfaction with what one obtains by God's Grace, worship of the *Guru*, moderation in eating, non-violence, truthfulness, *brahmacharyam*, austerities, and silence. Then he goes on to describe the different limbs of *yoga-sAdhanA*. A characteristic *shloka* from this description may be recalled (III – 28 – 11)

prANAyAmair-dahed-doshhAn dhAraNAbhishca kilbishhAn
pratyAhAreNa samsargAn dhyAnenA-anISvarAn guNAn

Meaning, By *prANAyAma* (exercise of control of breath) the physical faults are burnt; By *dhAraNa* (fixing of the concentrated mind) one burns off the sins; By *pratyAhAra* (withdrawal of senses from their outward attractions) one destroys the attachments to sense objects; By *dhyAna* (meditation) one vanquishes the undivine qualities.

And the meditation should be on the unique form of the Lord. Here the form of the Lord is sculpted by beautiful word-bricks by Sage Kapila in 13 memorable *shloka*s (III -28 – 21 to 33) which deserve to be memorised and recited in the original, in order to transmit the real flavour of the description. It is not just the collective form of the Lord that is meditated thus. Each of His limbs is imagined and looked at with concentration and one

goes on meditating on His limbs from toe to head. His lotus feet, His legs and thighs, the waist, the navel, the chest, the neck, the face, the smile – on each one of these one should stay long by meditation.

By such meditation one gradually develops pure love for the Lord. One's hairs stand erect through excessive joy. The intense love generates streams of tears. The mind withdraws from all material distractions. As if attracting a fish to a hook, the mind now attracts the Lord. The real identity of the Self is seen and all pleasure and pain are seen in their true colours as products of the Ego. The *jIvan-mukta* that he is, has no cognition of his own body whether it is sitting, standing, moving or acting, just as person blinded by intoxication does not realise the presence or absence of clothing on himself (III – 28 – 37):

The body, however, of the *jIvan-mukta* holds on along with the senses until the *prArabdha karma* remains. But, for the one who has made the ascent to *samAdhi-yoga* there is neither the cognition of the body or the universe associated with it. Indeed, when one has woken up, the dreams that were being witnessed earlier have no more any reality. (III – 28 -38).

Just as offsprings and wealth are considered distinct from oneself, so also is the *Purusha* different from one's body that is taken by affection to be oneself.

yathA putrAScha vitttA ca pRRithaG martyaH pratIyate /apyAtmatvatvenA-
bhimatAt dehAdeH Purushas-tathA // III – 28 -39

The blazing fire is different from the flames, from the sparks and from the smoke, although all arise from the same blazing wood. So also the Self known as the Seer, bhagavan or *Brahman* is distinct from the senses or the mind (40,41). As fire shows up in different forms because of the shapes of wood in which it burns so also does the Self show up in *prakRti* in different manifestations according to the *guNas* (#43). The yogI therefore stands firm in his own svarUpa of the Self, by conquering the *prakRti* which hides his own Self and which takes the form of both cause and effect(#44).

Following this the sage Kapila answers questions of Devahuti regarding the path of Bhakti which will lead to the Realisation of all that has been explained in terms of *prakRti* and *Purusha*. Bhakti, says Kapila, is known in terms of nine categories by the motivation which manifests it. The motivation could be – in the ascending order of commendability (III – 29 – 8,9, 10) as in the following table; the category of *bhakti* to which it belongs is shown in the right-hand column:

Motivation	*Category of Bhakti*
Violent ends	*adhama-tAmasa*
Pride	*madhyama-tAmasa*
Jealousy	*uttama-tAmasa*
Sensual ends	*adhama-rAjasa*
Wealth	*madhyama-rAjasa*

Fame	*uttama-rAjasa*
Eradication of Sins	*adhama-sAtvika*
Pleasure of the Lord	*madhyama-sAtvika*
Duty	*uttama-sAtvika*

But all of them have the commonality of "*bheda-darSana*" (which is conscious of the multiplicity of the deities and recognises the differences) as well as "idol worship" (worship of specific manifestations of the Ultimate). Over and above these, there is the *nirguNa bhakti*, defined as follows:

mad-guNa-shruti-mAtreNa mayi sarva-guhASaye /
mano-gatir-avicchinnA yathA GamgAmbhaso'mbudhau // (#11)
lakshhaNaM bhakti-yogasya nirguNasya hyudAhRRitaM /
ahaitukya-vyavahitA yA bhaktiH purushhottame // (#12)

Having heard about Him, one gets addicted with devotion that does not see any distinction, without any expectation of results, to the Purushhottama, who lives in the deepest hearts of all, like the waters of the Ganges that keeps on going to the ocean. That is the characteristic of *nirguNa bhakti*, the *bhakti* of the highest kind, higher than the nine categories mentioned above. And the Lord continues, as if inspired:

> *I am present in every living entity as the Self. Those who neglect or disregard this omnipresence and engage themselves in the worship of the Deity in the temple, they are only making a show of themselves. That is like offering oblations into ashes instead of in the Fire. He who thinks of Me, residing in the bodies of others, as different from his Self can never attain peace of mind. He never pleases Me even if he worships with proper rituals and paraphernalia. As long as one does not realise the omnipresent Me as resident in His own heart, so long has he to worship Me through images, performing all his prescribed duties. (#s III – 29: 21 to 25)*

The fortunate mother, Devahuti, who had all this teaching straight from the Lord Himself, who manifested as her son, followed the path that was chalked out by Him and in due time she reached that supreme abode glorified by Him.

2. Prahlada Charitam

The seventh book of BhA. is the story of Prahlada. It is the most fascinating account of how one who is devoted to the Lord in toto is never let down by Him and how the recitation of God's names as the only and final resort is the gateway to reach the Lotus Feet of God. Prahlada was the divine son of the undivine Hiranya-kaSipu whom the devas and asuras dreaded alike. Prahlada's unshakeable faith in the omnipresence of the Lord resulted in the Lord appearing to him from within a pillar, but appearing in such an unusual form of half-man-half-lion that it proved to be the end of Hiranyakashipu**.** The

story is so exemplary for the elaboration of Bhakti that Kamban the Tamil poet chooses to build into his Ramayana epic, through the mouth of the character Vibhishana, the entire story of Prahlada, in order to tell Ravana that even such a person as Hiranyakashipu finally had to collapse before the power and goodness of the Lord. **The faith of Prahlada is Faith par excellence**.

It was a faith that he inherited, not from his genes, but from the time he was in the womb of his mother. By a fortuitous circumstance as a child in the womb he was listening to the stories of great devotees recited by Sage Narada to his pregnant mother, but actually directed at the unborn child! By this miraculous turn of events Prahlada was a convinced and confirmed devotee right from his birth; not a devotee of any ordinary kind, but one who could lead the rest of the world in the exemplary devotion of the Supreme Lord – Shriman Narayana or *Vishnu* residing, with his consort Goddess Lakshmi, in Vaikuntha for all practical purposes, but really residing everywhere and, in particular, in the hearts of all living beings as the Transcendental Absolute.

The undivine nature of Hiranyakashipu and of his younger brother HiranyAksha was itself due to a curse which they both received from the team of the four most ancient sons of Creator Brahma, namely, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Santkumara. These four were created by sheer mental *sankalpa* of Brahma. When the latter wanted them to go and contribute to the creation by populating the world with their offsprings, they refused to abide by the suggestion. They were already enlightened when they were born and so, not being enamoured of any of the worldly distractions, they became renunciates right then and there. In fact these four are the earliest sages of earth and heaven.

The Lord declares in the *Gita* **(** X – 6):

“*maharshayas-sapta pUrve catvAro manavas-tathA*”

The four rishis mentioned here are these four who were not interested in progeny.

The story is told in the third skanda of BhA. how Jaya and Vijaya, the keepers of the final doors of the abode of Lord Shri *Vishnu*, were cursed by these four boy-sages, who looked only five years old, even though they were the oldest of all living creatures and had realized the truth of the self. They had open doors everywhere. They had no idea of "ours" and "theirs." With open minds, after crossing six doors (of the Lord’s mansion in Vaikuntha) freely out of their own will, they entered the seventh door, but were stopped there by Jaya and Vijaya, who were unaware of their greatness. The sages declared that these two door-keepers had no right to be in Vaikuntha and so they cursed them accordingly. Their declaration in this context is worth study:

(III–15–33, 34,): In this Vaikuṇṭha world there ought to be complete harmony between the residents and the Supreme Lord, just as there is complete harmony within space between the big and the small skies. For, the Lord contains everybody in Himself. Why then is there a seed of fear in this field of harmony? These two persons are dressed like inhabitants of Vaikuṇṭha, but wherefrom can their disharmony come into existence?

Therefore let us consider how these two contaminated persons should be punished. The punishment should be apt, for thus benefit can eventually be bestowed upon them. Since they find duality (in the form of friends and foes) in the existence of this Vaikuṇṭha life, they should be removed from this place to the material world, where the living entities have three kinds of enemies in the form of *krodha* (anger), *kAma* (lust) and *lobha* (greed).

By this time the Lord rushed outside to receive the sages Himself. He said that all these events had been willed by Him and He pleaded with the sages to offer a way out for His sincere devotees Jaya and Vijaya to get off the curse as early as possible. The sages offered them the choice between being born as devotees of God or being born as enemies of the Lord to be finally killed by the Lord Himself. The divine devotees chose the latter option.

Hence were born Hiranya-kashipu and Hiranyaksha as enemies of the Lord. Jaya and Vijaya were born three times. First as the anger (*krodha*) -dominated Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu in the Asuric world, second as the lust (*kAma*) -dominated Ravana and Kumbhakarna in the Rakshasa world and third as the greed (*lobha*) -dominated Sishupala and Dantavaktra in the human world.

Hiranyaksha was powerful and tyrannical enough to roll away the Earth itself and take it to the depths of distant waters in the nether worlds. Lord *Vishnu* took the incarnation of a giant Boar – this was His *VarAha-avatAra* – went into the waters, fought with Hiranyaksha, killed him and retrieved the Earth. Enraged by the killing of his brother, Hiranyakashipu ordered his men to go on rampage wherever there was worship of *Vishnu* as the Lord. Thus began a whole long era of atheism, cruelty, terror and aggression. It spread to the three worlds, because Hiranyakashipu, by a series of austerities, had invoked the blessing of Lord BrahmA on himself and had Him grant his request. The historic boon thus enunciated by Hiranyakashipu and granted by the Creator was that he would not meet his death at the hands of any creation of BrahmA, he would not meet his death by any weapon, either inside or outside his house, day or night, either on earth or above in the sky, either by human beings or animals, either by the living or non-living or by the demi-gods. Thus he protected himself from all sorts of possible death and this made him conquer the three worlds and declare himself the unchallenged Lord of the World, in fact, God Himself!

He went to Vaikuntha, the highest abode of *Vishnu*, the abode where His devotees live in the eternal bliss of companionship with Him and service to Him. Hiranya-kashipu wanted to challenge God *Vishnu* in his own home, but the Lord was not visible to Him for He went and resided in Hiranya-kashipu's heart! The demon searched for Him in all the three worlds and naturally could not find his enemy! Thereafter he proclaimed that no more propitiation of *Vishnu* as the Supreme Lord of the world is allowed anywhere. They should all propitiate him instead. He was the Lord, God and Saviour, ever! Several thousands of years passed in this manner. The Gods of the heavens went and prostrated before Lord *Vishnu*. The Lord assured them that in due time a noble son would be born to Hiranya-kashipu and when his atrocities reach the stage of even killing his own son for

the perpetuation of his own egoism, then would be the time for his own end. The Devas went reassured and abided their time.

Then was born the divine son, Prahlada. He was one of the four sons born to Hiranyakashipu but he was the noblest of them all and the most unique. The epithets that Kamban uses for him are inspiring: Scholarly among the scholars; purer than the scriptures; and the purest among the pure.

(In Tamil: *aRijnarin aRijnan tUyar enbavar yArinuM maRaiyinuM tUyan*)
(K.R. **:** *Iraniyan Vadaipppadalam:* 148)

His affection to the Lord was a natural one. Even as a child he would not play with his mates in the usual frivalous way. His mind was full of the Lord Govinda, whether he was sitting, walking, eating, sleeping, or talking. Sometimes he would be seen laughing and some other times he would be seen crying. His hairs would stand on end at the thought or mention of God. His was a possessed behaviour, possessed by God. It was with such a noble soul that Hiranyakashipu chose to cross swords.

As the King of the land, the father entrusted the education of the five-year old boy to the care of the two sons of his *Guru*, Shukra-acharya. These two preceptors Sanda and Amarka by name**,** started the education of Prahlada in the conventional way earmarked for them as *the* way, by the King. It was to begin with the declaration that Hiranyakashipu was the Lord-God of the world and everything should be begun only after making the first prostration to him as the Supreme Lord. But Prahlada would not do any such thing. He would bow only to Lord Narayana, the Lord of Vaikuntha and of all the worlds. In the beginning the teachers thought it was only due to childish pranks and they ignored these protests of Prahlada for some time. But the matter came to light when the King called his son to his lap and began enquiring what he had learnt at the feet of the preceptors. Specifically, he asked the question: ‘What do you consider, my son, as a good thing’?

papraccha kathyathAm vatsa manyate sAdhu yad-bhavAn

That brought forth a shockingly grand reply from the child prodigy:

tat-sAdhu manye asura-varya dehinAM sadA samudvigna-dhiyAm-asadgrahAt /
hitvA AtmapAtaM gRRiham-andha-kUpaM vanaM gato yad-harim-ASrayeta //
(VII – 5 – 5)

I consider that as great, which, leaving aside this attachment to the body as ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ renouncing this bondage which takes one lower in evolution, takes one to the forest where one can propitiate the Lord *Vishnu*, the destroyer of all ills.

Hiranya-kashipu was taken aback. But he was too convinced of his way of doing things to face reality. He just warned the preceptors that they should teach him ‘the right thing’ and sent them away. The preceptors did their best to teach the boy ‘the right thing’.

Instead they were obliged with a lecture from the child Prahlada as to what is right knowledge and what is not! They told him not to take the name of Narayana, the enemy of his father. And Prahlada naively replied: (K.R. *Iraniyan Vadaip-paDalaM*, Verse 154):

> *Ennai uyvitten entaiyai uyvitten inaiya Unnai uyvittu ivvulagaiyum uyvippAn*
> *amain du Munnai vedattin mudar-peyar mozhivathu mozhinden*
> *Ennai kutram nAn iyambiyathu iyambudi endrAn*

> Meaning, Tell me what crime have I done. By taking the name that even the vedas use as the First Name I have redeemed not only myself, but my father, you and this entire world.

The preceptors tried several means to convince him. The four means of *sAma, dAna, bheda* and *daNDa* all were tried by them – all to no avail. Finally they took him to the king and expected the King himself to discover the problem. Again King Hiranyakashipu asked the child to tell him what he had learnt. Back came a spirited reply, which has since been quoted across the world millions of times. It is one of the grandest pronouncements of Hindu religion:

shravaNaM kIrtanaM vishNoH smaraNaM pAdasevanaM /archanaM vandanaM dAsyaM sakhyaM Atma-nivedanaM // iti pumsArpitA vishNau bhaktiScen-nava-lakshaNA /kriyate bhagavad-yad-vA tan manye adhItaM uttamaM // VII – 5 – 23, 24

That action is the greatest lesson one learns which expresses itself in terms of the nine manifestations of devotion to Lord *Vishnu*, namely,

Listening to the recitals of the names and glories of God	*shravaNaM*
Reciting the names of God	*kIrtanaM*
Recalling Him and His deeds	*smaraNaM*
Waiting on Him	*pAda-sevanaM*
Worshipping Him	*archanaM*
Saluting & prostrating before Him	*vandanaM*
Serving Him	*dAsyaM*
Befriending Him	*sakhyaM*
Dedicating one's self to Him	*Atma-nivedanaM*.

Hiranya-kashipu was naturally furious on hearing this. He questioned the preceptors as to who taught Prahlada and where he got all this 'old-fashioned stuff'. The preceptors washed their hands off the whole business and told the truth that this boy had somehow got it into his head and they were not able to change it. It was then the father asked the child: Tell me, my son, who taught you all this? Prahlada gives a profound talk on *Vishnu* Bhakti. 'Bhakti towards *Vishnu*', says Prahlada 'does not come from any external source; nor is it achievable by those who revolve around mundane attractions all the time. They are only blind leading the blind. Without satsangh one cannot hope to reach *Vishnu*'s lotus feet. And unless one resorts to those feet one can never hope to get out of this samsara'.

The King could not stand this any longer. He was furious. 'Go and have this boy killed, at any cost', ordered the King. They tried to kill him in several ways. He was pierced by spears; he was crushed by elephants; snakes were set upon him to bite him to death; he was administered poison; and he was thrown from the top of the mountain. Nothing could kill him. The saintly child came out of everything totally unscathed. All the time he was chanting the name of Narayana.

The two preceptors suggested to the King that he better lie low until the senior *Guru*, their father, came back. So the boy was again taken to the *guru*'s home and education continued, but now on the rules and regulations that apply to a householder. In between whenever the preceptors were not on the scene, the other boys who were studying along with Prahlada wanted to know from him about Narayana who seemed to be protecting him all the time. Here follows one of the most beautiful pieces of the BhA., namely Prahlada's sermon to his classmates:

> If a man is wise he should start doing dharmic deeds. Even that should be started while still one is young. For, the human birth is so rare among all births. Even in one's birth, one does not know when death will end that life. Lord *Vishnu* is the friend and indwelling AtmA, in all lives. So what we do should be to please Him. Those who serve the lotus feet of Lord *Vishnu* will never perish. Man loses half of his 100-year life in sleep. Foolish in childhood and lustful in youth, he loses another twenty years, and another twenty are lost in old age and incapacitation. Therefore do good while still it is not too late. Do that which propitiates Achyuta, the Lord *Vishnu*. Leave aside your demonish qualities and have sympathy and compassion towards all living beings.

Thus goes Prahlada on and on. The sixth chapter of Skanda VII, beginning with

"kaumAra Acharet prAjnaH dharmAn bhAgavatAn iha"

is all Prahlada's beautiful Vedanta teaching to his classmates. He ends up his sermon with the thrilling statement that he learnt all this from Sage Narada. They immediately ask a most legitimate question: You have been all the time with us all these years. When did you happen to meet the sage and learn all this? That is the time when he tells them that he had learnt all this while still in the womb of his mother and Sage Narada was sermonising apparently to his mother but really to him inside. By the Lord's Grace he remembers all these! And he continues and repeats the exact words of Narada, in a form which constitutes what we may call Prahlada's advaita capsule! We shall only quote the following five *shloka*s from this capsule. (BhA.: VII - 7 - 19, 20, 23, 24 and 25) .

AtmA nityo-vyayaH shuddhaH ekaH kshhetrajna AshrayaH /avikRRiyaH svadRRig-hetuH vyApako'sangy-anAvRRitaH //etair-dvAdashabir-vidvAn Atmano lakshhaNaiH paraiH /ahaM mamety-asad-bhAvaM dehAdau mohajaM tyajet //

The *Atman*

is permanent
does not undergo any change
is uncontaminated by *mAyA*

has neither internal nor external distinctions
is the one intelligent being which cognizes everything
needs no support but supports everything
neither acts nor is acted upon
sees everything but is not seen
is the primal cause but is itself never caused
is beyond space, time and matter
is unattached to anything
can never be negated by anything

These are the twelve indicative qualities of *Atman*, by a knowledge of which one should be able to throw away the false identification with the body, mind and intellect.

dehastu sarva-sanghAto jagat tasthuriti dvidhA /
atraiva mRRigyaH purushho neti netIt-yatat tyajan //
anvaya-vyatirekeNa vivekenoshatA''tmanA /
sarga-sthAna-samAmnAyaiH vimRRishadbhir-asatvaraiH //
buddher-jAgaraNaM svapnaH sushhuptiriti vRRittayaH/
tA yenaiv-AnubhUyante so'dhyakshhaH purushhaH paraH //

Meaning: The body is a conglomeration of all (the effects of *prakRti* -- referred in *shloka*s 22,23, not quoted here) and is of two kinds, mobile and immobile. It is here in the body that the Self (*Purusha*) is to be sought for by discarding every non-Self as 'not this' 'not this', by men coolly reflecting on the creation, continued existence and dissolution of the universe with a mind purified through reasoning on the lines of '*anvaya*' (the all-pervasiveness of the Absolute) and '*vyatireka*' (the distinctness of the Absolute from everything else). Wakefulness, dream and deep sleep -- these are the three functions of the inntellect. He alone by whom they are directly cognized is the transcendent *purusha*, the witness of everything.

Hiranya-kashipu, the father, hears about all this drama about his son Prahlada preaching to the student-inmates of the *Guru*kulam, about *Vishnu*-Bhakti and *Vishnu* being the Self of everybody. He decides to put an end to this ‘treachery’ going on under his own roof. He brings Prahlada to his assembly hall and asks the million-dollar question: Little one, Who is your source of strength? (*kaste balaM* ?) Prahlada’s reply to this is to be embedded in golden letters:

Not only for me, but, for you as well as for all this world, nay, for all the three worlds, Lord Narayana is the strength.
balaM me vaikunThas-tava ca jagatAM cApi sa balaM sa eva trailokyaM
sakalam-iti dhIro'yam-agadhIt (Na. *: 25 – 9)*

The author of Na. has condensed in this couple of lines what Shuka reports to us more elaborately as Prahlada’s words: (Actually it is Narada’s telling of the story to Yudhishtira)

Not only for me, Oh King, but for you also and for all those who think of themselves as ‘strong’. All that is animate or inanimate, high or low, from the Creator Brahma

downwards, they are all controlled by that single Source of Might & Power. He is the Almighty, the One who calls the tune (even) for Time; He is the source of all our senses and of the physical and mental strength of us all. He is the Master of all the three guNas. He is the One who creates, sustains and absorbs the entire universe.

Na kevalaM me bhavatashca rAjan sa vai balaM balinAM cApareshhAM /
Pare'vare'mI sthira-jangamA ye bhramAdayo yena vashaM praNItAH // VII – 8 – 8
Sa ISvaraH kAla urukramo'sau ojas-sahaH sattva-balendriyAtmA /Sa eva
vishvaM paramaM sva-shaktibhiH sRRijaty-avaty-atti guNa-trayeshaH // VII – 8 – 9

Kamban, in Tamil, has this description of the Infinite Absolute, through the mouth of Prahlada, in this context:

His qualities are three (*satva, rajas* and *tamas*);
His actions are three (Creation, Protection and Dissolution);
His forms are three (BrahmA, Vishnu and Shiva);
His eyes are three (the Sun, Moon and Fire);
His worlds are three (*bhU, bhuvaH and suvaH*).
All that have a beginning, a middle and an end constitute
a monumental proof of His existence.
This is also the bottomline of all the Vedas.

MunRu avan guNangaL cheigai mUnRu avan uruvaM mUnRu mUnRu kaN
chuDar koL joti mUnRu avan ulagaM mUnRu tOnRaluM iDaiyuM IruM
toDangiya poruLgaL ellAM shAnRu avan iduve veda muDivu idu cadaM enRAn
(K.R. **:** Iraniyan vadaip-paDalam Verse 251).

Hiranya-Kashipu is at the height of his fury. With sword in hand, he moves about the hall and asks to know where this Lord of Prahlada is hiding.He is ready to settle the issue then and there. He challenges Prahlada: If he is everywhere as you declare with pride, tell me, do you see him here in this pillar? And he points out to one of the gigantic pillars in that hall. Prahlada with infinite confidence, says: Yes, I see Him. Not seeing what his son was seeing, the King**,** gives the pillar a forceful kick as if he would break the pillar and see who is within.

Lo and behold! That was the time when the entire world and that assemblage in particular, heard a deafening explosive noise as if the world itself was exploding to pieces with a big bang! Even BrahmA the creator fell down from His seat in distant heavens, it appears, from the shock wave sent by this gigantic noise. The author of *Na.* says at this point, he becomes dumb-founded in his narration of the events, because the scene that followed was so scaring and hair-raising. The fact of the matter was, the pillar split into two with that explosive noise which the three worlds heard and right there the Lord appeared in a most unusual form. It was the appearance of a half-lion half-man. The roar that the man-lion (*nara-simha*) raised at that time sent jitters into the bones of even Hiranya-Kashipu. He did not expect anything of the sort to happen. Much less did he expect to see this unusual figure of the so-called enemy of his**.** He immediately remembered his own boon he got from BrahmA that he would not be killed by man or

animal. Now right before him there was neither a man nor an animal, but both in one form!

God appeared at that time in that fashion, says VyAsa, for two reasons – one to prove true the words of his favourite and two, to prove to the world His immanence and permeation in everything:

> *satyaM vidhAtuM nija-bhRRitya-bhAshhitaM vyAptaM cha bhUteshh-vakhileshhu chAtmanaH /adRRishyata atyadbhuta-rUpam-udvahan stambhe sabhAyAM na mRRigam na mAnushhaM* //(Bh. VII – 8 – 18)

One of the most important divine descents was when the Lord appeared as *nara-simha* (half-man-half-lion) to bless the boy Prahlada. God appeared at that time from the pillar in that fashion, says Vyasa, the author of the *BhA.*, to prove true the words of his favourite: (*BhA.*, 7 - 8 - 18): *satyam vidhAtum nija-bhRtya-bhAshitam.*

Who was the favourite whose words He had to prove true? First and foremost it is the boy-devotee, Prahlada, no doubt. He asserted with the greatest coinfidence that God is everywhere and therefore also in the pillar. This was to be vindicated. But the vindication, simultaneously, was also of other statements. BrahmA, the Creator, had given the Asura king the unusual boon whereby he will not meet his death with either a man or an animal. That had to be proved true. Even before Prahlada was born, Narada had assured Indra, the King of the gods, when he was carrying away Hiranyakashipu's Queen with Prahlada in her womb, that the child in the womb was not going to die at the hands of Indra but on the other hand he was going to be a great devotee of the Lord. Hiranyakashipu himself had predicted on seeing the adamance of Prahlada's devotion to *Vishnu* that 'this boy is going to bring my death if I do not kill him', and this was to be vindicated too. Thus the words '*satyaM vidhAtuM nija-bhRRitya-bhAshhitaM'* is pregnant with the secret of the Lord's Avatara and substantiates that when the Lord comes, He comes not with just a single purpose, but wills that it may serve several causes.

> **Two parallels for the significance of 'satyam vidhAtuM' :**
>
> In Srimad BhA. Skanda 1, Ch.9 -37, Bhishma praises Krishna: "In the field of battle in order to make true my words (that I would make You take up arms and thus break Your pledged word not to touch any weapon), You did actually abandon Your promise (in the guise of protecting Arjuna from imminent danger) You rushed at me with Sudarsana disc in Your hand …" ('*sva-nigamam-apahAya mat-pratijnAm Rtam-adhikartuM avapluto rathasthaH*').
>
> In V.R. Rama comes to Jatayu, learns of his impending death (caused by the attack of Ravana) and on his death performs the funeral rites of Jatayu, probably remembering the fact that the animal Jatayu had been promised by Rama's father Dasaratha that he will give his first son to Jatayu (his friend and oned-time saviour). Thus another promise of the father is upheld by the son!

And to vindicate BrahmA's boon in all its entirety, the Narasimha form of the Lord which was now striking terror in everybody in the assembly except Prahlada, jumped on

Hiranya-kashipu and carried him aloft to the gate of the palace so that it was neither inside the house nor outside. All defenses of Hiranyakashipu were of no avail before the fiery Narasimha Swami,who put him on his lap, so that it was neither on the Earth nor in the sky. It was evening time so that it was neither day nor night. The nails of the man-lion pierced the chest of the Asura King, tore open the heart and put an end to his life. The end came therefore by neither the living nor the non-living, because the nails of a body can be classified as neither.

The gods and other divine beings had already assembled in the heavens to watch this scene which put an end to the longest period of humiliation for them and for the world. But the fury of Narasimha Avatara had not subsided. He fought with those warriors who rose up in defense of the King and killed them all. BrahmA the Creator and all the other Gods sang praises of the Lord but no one dared go near Him. Every one looked at Prahlada. BrahmA signed to him to go near the Lord and pacify him. Prahlada went near the Lord and prostrated before him. The Lord lifted him up and caressingly touched him on the head.

How is it possible for me, says Prahlada, who have been born in a family of asuras, to offer suitable prayers to the Lord? One may possess wealth, an aristocratic family, beauty, austerity,education, sensory expertise, lustre, influence, physical strength, diligence, intelligence and mystic yogic power, all these qualifications will not satisfy the Lord if *bhakti* – dedication and devotion -- is not there. Even if a brahmin has all these qualifications but is not a devotee and is averse to the lotus feet of the Lord, he is certainly lower than that devotee who may be a dog-eater but who has dedicated everything-- mind, words, activities, wealth and life-- to the Supreme Lord. Such a devotee is better than a brahmin because while the devotee can purify his whole family, the so-called brahmin in a position of false prestige cannot purify even himself. My Lord Nrsimhadeva, please, cease Your anger now that my father, the great demon Hiranyakasipu, has been killed. My Lord, I am certainly not afraid of Your ferocious mouth and tongue, Your eyes bright like the sun or Your frowning eyebrows. I do not fear Your sharp, pinching teeth, Your garland of intestines, Your mane soaked with blood, or Your high, wedgelike ears. Nor do I fear Your tumultuous roaring. But I am very much afraid of my condition of life within this material world. When will that moment come when You will call me to the shelter of Your lotus feet, which are the ultimate goal for liberation from samsAra?

Prahlada goes on like this. The song of praise that poured forth from this little boy in this context is full of Vedanta content. Here are a few *shloka*s out of the 43 (VII – 9 - #s 8 to 50) that constitutes *Prahlada-stuti* in Chapter 9 of the 7th Skanda:

tasmAd-amUs-tanu-bhRRitAM aham-Ashishho'jna
AyuH shriyaM vibhavam-aindriyam-AvirinchyAt /
necchAmi te vilulitAn-uruvikrameNa
kAlAtmanopanaya mAM nija-bhRRitya-pArshvaM // 24

Meaning: I do not wish for your benedictions for long life, or the worldly opulence, mystic power,and other material pleasures enjoyed by all living entities, from Lord Brahma down to the ant. As powerful Time, You destroy

them all. I only request You to place me in touch with Your pure devotee and let me serve him.

kutrAshishhaH shruti-sukhA mRRiga-tRRishhNi-rUpAH
kvedaM kalevaram-asheshha-rujAM virohaH /
nirvidyate na tu jano yad-apIti vidvAn
kAmAnalaM madhu-lavaiH shamayan durApaiH // 25

Meaning: In this material world, every living entity desires some future happiness, which is exactly like a mirage in the desert. So where is this happiness? Where is this body, which is merely a generator of various diseases? The so-called learned person does not get satiated and he aspires for more and more of this 'happiness'. It is very difficult to calm down the blazing fire of lusty desires by pouring drops of honey-like happiness on it.

Ekas-tvam-eva jagad-etam-amushhya yat tvaM
AdyantayoH pRRitag-avasyasi madhyatashca /
sRRishhTvA guNa-vyatikaraM nija-mAyayedaM
nAneva tair-avasitas-tad-anupravishhTaH // 30

You, a single Person, has become this entire universe; In the beginning, in the end, and also in the interregnum, you exist, independently (of your own creation). By the play of the guNas you create this universe; by your own *mAyA* this appears as the universe of multiplicity in which you have subtly permeated.

tvaM vA idam sadasad-Isha bhavAms-tato'nyo
mAyA yad-Atma-para-buddhir-iyaM hy-apArthA /
yadyasya janma-nidhanaM sthitir-IkshhaNaM ca
tad-vai tad-eva vasukAlavad-ashTi-tarvoH // 31

The entire cosmic creation is caused by You, and the cosmic manifestation is an effect of Your energy. Although the entire cosmos is but You alone, You keep Yourself aloof from it. The conception of "mine and yours," is certainly a type of illusion [maya] because everything is an emanation from You and is therefore not different from You. Indeed, the cosmic manifestation is nondifferent from You, and the annihilation is also caused by You. This relationship between Your Lordship and the cosmos is like that of the seed and the tree, or the subtle cause and the gross manifestation.

prAyeNa deva munayaH sva-vimukti-kAmAH
maunaM charanti vijane na parArtha-nishhTAH /
naitAn vihAya kRRipaNAn vimumukshha eko
nAnyaM tvadasya sharaNaM bhramato'nupashye // 44

Many saintly persons are only interested in their own deliverance. They roam about in solitary places in silence. They are not interested in the well-being of their contemporaries. Leavising aside the feeble ones of the world I don't want to attain *moksha* all by myself. I don't see any other resort for these deluded ones, except Yourself, Oh Lord.

Yan-maithunAdi gRRiha-medhi sukhaM hi tucchaM
kaNDUyanena karayoriva dukha-dukhaM /

tRRipyanti neha kRRipaNA bahu-dukha-bhAjaH
kaNDUtivan manasijaM vishhaheta dhIraH // 45

The pleasure that a householder obtains from sex is a trivial one; like scratching for the itching in the hands, it is only a chain of distress. Even after suffering repeated unhappiness, foolish ones do not cry a halt to the scratching-like pleasure. Only the brave soul overcomes what (lust) arises in the mind.

Mauna-vrata-shruta-tapo'dhyayana-svaDharma-
vyAkhyA-raho-japa-samAdhaya ApavargyAH /
prAyaH paraM purushha te tvajitendriyANAM
vArtA bhavantyuta na vAtra tu dAmbhikAnAM // 46

Silence, austerities, learning, penance, vedic recitation, practice of one's own Dharma, teaching, solitude, *japa* and *samAdhi* – are all means towards *moksha*, no doubt. But mostly they are just professional aids (*jIvanopAya*) for those who have yet to control their senses. And for those who are given to show themselves off, they do not even serve as such.

rUpe ime sad-asati tava veda-sRRishhTe
bIjAnkurAviva na chAnyad-arUpakasya /
yuktAs-samakshham-ubhayatra vicakshhante tvAM
yogena vahnim-iva dArushhu nAnyataH syAt // 47

All these created forms either gross like earth, water and fire or subtle like air and space – none of them are distinct from the formless you; it is like seed and plant; those who are one with you see you through their yoga both externally and internally, like fire in wood, as nothing else than you.

Recall **ahaM bIja-pradaH pitA** (B.G. 14 – 4); **bIjaM mAM sarva-bhUtAnAM** (B.G. VII – 10); **nidhAnaM bIjam-avyayaM** (B.G. 9 – 18).

tat te'rhattama namaH stuti-karma-pUjAH
karma-smRRitish-charaNayoH shravaNaM kathAyAM /
samsevayA tvayi vineti shhaD-angayA kim
bhaktiM janaH paramahamsa-gatau labheta //50

I offer my respectful obeisances to You, the most deserving of those to whom we may pray. Without rendering the six kinds of devotional service, such as singing your praise, working for you, worshipping you with spiritual activities, dedicating the results of all actions, always remembering Your lotus feet and hearing about Your glories--who can achieve that which is obtainable by the paramahamsas?

We may recall here B. G. XVIII – 55: **bhaktyA mAm abhijAnAti ...** **(**Only) by *bhakti* I am known ... B.G. VIII -**22 :** **purushhas-sa paraH pArtha bhaktyA labhyas-tvananyayA** -- That transcendental purusha, Oh Arjuna, is obtainable only by advaita-*bhakti*.

At the end of it all the Lord asked him to ask for any boon. Prahlada refused to ask any boon except to say:

Yadi rAsIsha me kAmAn varAmstvaM varadarshhabha /kAmAnAM hRRidya-samrohaM bhavatastu vRRiNe varaM //indriyANi manaH prANa AtmA dharmo dhRRitir-matiH /hrIH shrIstejaH smRRitis-satyaM yasya nashyanti janmanA// (VII -10 – 7, 8)

If you want to grant me boons please grant me the non-sprouting of such desires in my heart as vanquish the functioning of the senses, mind, prANa, body, Dharma, courage, intelligence, shame, opulence, memory, truth.

Lord Narasimha was so pleased with Prahlada that He granted him a long life of kingship of this world (until the end of the then-Manu) with all material honours and prosperity, a life full of spiritual activity and at the end of it all a union with the Absolute Divine.

Sage Narada in his narration of this story of Prahlada to King Yudhishtira, winds up with this phala-shruti:

Etad-ya Adipurushhasya mRRigendra-lIlAM
daityendra-yUthapa-vadhaM prayataH paTheta /
daityAtmajasya cha satAM pravarasya puNyaM
shrutvAnubhAvam-akuto bhayameti lokaM // VII – 10 - 47

Whoever recites or listens to, this story of the Narasimha – leela and his destruction of the Asura king along with his gang, and also hears the story of the meritorious Prahlada, such a one reaches the abode of the Lord. For him there is no fear or anxiety.

3. Story of JaDabharata

The history of Priyavrata, the first son of Manu Svayambhuva, is taken up in the fifth skanda of BhA. Priyavrata's son was Agnidhra and his son was Nabhi. Nabhi was a great and devout ruler and to him was born another avatar of Mahavishnu, by name Rishabha. Rishabha, also called Rishabhadeva had 100 sons of whom the eldest was Bharata whose story we are going to see elaborately.

(Incidentally it is this Bharata after whom this country was called *BhArata-varsha*; before that time, it was called *aja-nAbha varsha*).

Rishabha on retirement from the duties of the state called his sons before him and gave them all a long sermon on the need to lead a spiritual life. This sermon constitutes the first 27 *shloka*s of the fifth chapter of the fifth skanda. It is sometimes called Rishabha-*Gita*. For a sample we take the first *shloka* here.

This body is not meant to be used for sensuous enjoyments as done by lowly animals. There are two doors out of this life. One is the door for *moksha* and the other is the door for the darkness of hell.

Mahat-sevAM dvAramAhur-vimukteH
tamo-dvAraM yoshitAM sangi-sangaM / (V – 5 – 2 –first half).

The door to *moksha* is by service to great people. But the door to hell is the association of those who have association with women of easy repute.

Note the words **yoshhitAM sangi-sangaM**. To go upward on the spiritual path one needs a direct contact with great people. But to cause a slide downward even a secondary contact with the vile ones will do – that is, a primary contact with those people who have themselves a direct contact with vile women.

In the second line of the same *shloka* he demarcates who those great ones are:

mahAntas-te sama-chittAH prashAntAH vimanyavaH suhRRidaH sAdhavo ye //
(V – 5 – 2 – second half)

Great ones are those who are equanimous, peaceful, angerless, friendly and noble and pious.

By the union of man and woman attachment arises to home, family, sons, wealth and property. Those who want to reach God must see to it that they should advise their children as a father, train their people as a boss or a leader, and teach their diswciples as a *Guru*. A father who does not do so is not a father; a king who does not do so is not a king; a *guru* who does not do so is not a *guru*.

After giving such teaching in very forceful words King Rishabhadeva relinquished his kingdom, left his palace and roamed about as one intoxicated with God and the Godly, completely nude, with dishevelled hair and uncouth appearance. Actually he moved about as if he were senseless, blind, dumb and deaf, a ghost or a drunkard; even though others spoke to him he did not speak, because he was observing total silence:

jaDAndha-mUka-badhira-pishAchonmAdakavat avadhUta-veshaH abhibhAshhyamANo'pi janAnAM gRRihIta-mauna-vrataH tUshhNIM babhUva (V – 5 – 29).

This avatara of the Lord is to teach us worldly minded people to change our ways and reach Moksha. (*ayam avatAro rajas-opapluta-kaivalyopa-sikshhaNArthaH*).

Incidentally Shuka adopts a prose style of narration for most of this fifth skanda. Earlier in the third and fourth skanda it was all verse; probably he wanted to stick to the way the narration was given by Maitreya to Vidhura. But now in the fifth skanda he is himself telling the story and this time it is about two great *Brahma-jnAni*s – Rishabha and Bharata – and as a *Brahma-jnAni* himself Shuka probably did not want to be bound by meter, prosody etc. which usually are obligatory restrictions in the verse form of narration.

Bharata, his son, ruled the country for a long, long time ("for one crore years!") in the most notable manner, without ever swerving from the dharmic path. And his people were also following Dharma in a remarkable manner. The yajnas and *pUjA*s that he performed incessantly purified his mind to such an extent that the Lord was residing in his heart almost visibly. Finally he distributed his kingdom to his sons, left all his wealth and possessions and went over to distant pulahAshrama for a period of penance and whole-

time spiritual pursuit. Entirely devoid of any mundane desires or attachments, he was worshipping the Lord with all the flowers, leaves and fruits that he could get in the forest there. His *bhakti* towards the Lord increased day by day and he was living all the time in a state of total bliss in the company of the Lord in his heart. The constant contemplation of the lotus feet of the Lord generated a superlative joy of devotional experience. In that joy he forgot himself as well as the very worship he was doing. He just lost himself in divine contemplation in a kind of spiritual trance.

And then it happened one day.

ekadA tu mahA-nadyAM kRRitA-bhishheka-naiyamikA-vashyakaH bhrahmAkshharam-abhigRRiNAnaH muhUrta-trayaM udakAnte upavivesha // V – 8 - 1

Once after his daily routine bath he was sitting on the bank of the river for four and a half hours doing the japa of AUM. A solitary doe approached the river for drinking water. Suddenly there was a terrifying roar of a lion. By nature the doe trembled with fear on hearing the roar; frightened and shaken by that roar, the doe jumped across the river. In that frightful jump she gave birth to an young one which fell into the river. The mother doe, due to shock, delivery, and the act of springing, fell dead on the other side of the river. The King Bharata saw all this and overpowered with compassion at the poor little deer that had now lost its mother and was about to be itself lost in the current of the river. Instinctively he caught hold of the little one, brought it to his own ashram and started taking care of it. Very soon he felt it was 'his'!. From that day onwards he started feeding it, searched for the proper grass for its food, protected it from wild animals and was doing everything for its care, nourishment and growth. Slowly and gradually his time was more and more occupied with caring and tending to the needs of the infant deer; the time that he usually allotted for his spiritual disciplines got reduced steadily to almost a nothing!

Compassion and affection are not wrong; in fact they are very noble qualities. But when they become an attachment, then the spiritual fall is imminent. **Affection ennobles, but attachment enslaves. Love elevates but desire entraps**. This is what happened in the case of this great King Bharata.

With the attachment to the deer growing in intensity day by day , he began to be thinking all the time only of this deer that was now dearest to him. *Asana-shayana-aTana-sthAna-ashanAdishhu* -- whether he was sitting or sleeping, wallking or standing, or was eating, he was not wanting to be separated from the young deer. In short he was already bound to it in thought and deed. If the deer even for a little time was away from him he worried about its safety and began to wail over the matter. Even when he was trying to do his daily japa the deer would come near him and cuddle around him and he would take pity on it and put it on his lap and appreciate how this pet of his behaves like an own son!

This great king who renounced his vast kingdom and all the riches which he acquired as well as his family and people, for the sake of pursuing a life of total renunciation and tapas – how could such a renouncer fall into the trap of worldly affection for just a deer-cub and forget even his daily spiritual routine like this? What else could it be but his

prArabdha in the form of this deer? Time passed like this and all his *Atma-vichAra* had come to a dead stop. But the hour of Death would not wait for him; it came when it was due. He knew the end was coming. And he worried about what would happen to this poor deer-cub when he was gone! He was thinking about it, when he breathed his last.

And he was born as a deer!

But because of the intense *pUjA* and tapas he had been doing all his life, even in the body of the deer, his mind, by the Grace of God, remembered his previous life as Bharata and the calamity that had befallen him at the end of that life. So now he decided that he would not develop any more attachment or *VAsanA*. The deer Bharata deserted his surrounding deer-family and somehow went over to the same Pulahashrama where he was doing his tapas in the previous life. The deer Bharata did not eat tasty green grass or any of the other things that deer are fond of. He only subsisted on a minimum dried grass and lived aloof from any of his own species. He lived in the company of Sadhus who were doing tapas in the Ashrama and was waiting for this life to pass and his *prArabdha* to spend itself. He was decided not to acquire any more *vAsanA* even if he got a human life. The end came and when it came, the deer Bharata went to the river and stood up in neck-deep water and for the first time as a deer, raised his voice and 'spoke' God's name, dipped in the water and died!

His next birth was in a noble Brahmin family. This was his last birth. His father was a great, scholarly Brahmin with purest intentions who led a religious life, with his nine sons from his first wife and a twin-child from his second wife. Of the twins one was male and the other was female. The male of the twin was JaDa-bharata, our hero. The name that applied to him in this birth is not mentioned by Shuka. So, to continue our story we shall still call him Bharata. But expositors who refer to him as JaDa-bharata. 'JaDa' means inert; from his very birth he remained totally silent and was behaving like an idiot, not responding to any provocation. By the Grace of God he had all the memory of his two previous lives, one as King Bharata and the next as the lone deer of Pulahashrama. So he was scared of any accumulation of any more *vAsanA*. So he showed himself as mad, inert, blind, deaf and dumb.

The father, wanting to discharge his responsibilities, and hoping that this jaDa nature of the boy might be cured by a proper *samskAra*, performed the Upanayanam (thread ceremony) for the boy and prodded him on to do the daily Sandhya worship. But the boy would do no such thing! He was already a *Brahma-jnAni* and was in that state all the time, though the outside world, including his own family, could not recognise him as such. All their teaching of the Vedas or the *GAyatrI* was a failure as far as they were concerned! The father died in due time and the second wife, the mother of JaDabharata also followed him immediately.

The nine brothers of JaDa-bharata who were knowledgeable only about the *karma-*kANDa of the Vedas and had no idea of the Brahmavit among them treated him as a good-for-nothing fool. Consequently they simply extracted work from him and fed him only some rotten food, that deserved to be thrown in the garbage. He came to grow in the

entire neighbourhood as a robust young man but a confirmed idiot. Whatever menial work anybody gave him he did it, but not intelligently. They put him as a sentry in the fields to ward off birds and he sat there unendingly. Some one gives him instructions to dig and he digs ; someone else comes along and asks him to stop and he stops. Some one gives him a beating for not doing his work properly and he receives it without murmur or protest. Whatever he gets he accepted it, without ever caring whether it is more or less, good or bad. Whatever they gave him, be it rice flour, oil-cake, chaff, spoilt pulses, or charred food – he ate up everything as if it were nectar:

YadA tu parata AhAraM karma-vetana IhamAnaH sva-bhrAtRRibhirapi kedAra-karmaNi nirUpitaH tadapi karoti kintu na samaM vishhamaM nyUnaM adhikaM iti veda kaNa-piNyAka-palI-karaNa-kulmAsha-sthAlIpurIshhAdIny-api amRRitavad-abhyavaharati // V- 9 – 11.

It goes on like this day by day, year by year. He is decided not to care for this body and so his body is filthy, his dhoti dirty, and his face, with a long beard, looks like a caveman. He was living a Brahmavit totally aloof from his body.

It turned out that some rich man wanted to give a nara-bali (sacrifice of a human) to Goddess Kali and had arranged for a captive intended for the nara-bali. But just on the previous night the captive escaped and they needed immediately a substitute for the next morning's ritual. The rich man sent his assistants to look for a substitute. They roamed about and found our JaDa-bharata sitting alone in the fields. His robust appearance and youth tempted them to choose him as their victim for the nara-bali and they simply led him on to their boss. Never had a victim for nara-bali come along with them, as this man did, without the least protest. It appeared to them he was almost willing to die for them. The next day the ritual started in the presence of the Kali deity; he was bathed in oil, washed clean, dressed gorgeously, decorated with sandal paste and other cosmetics and finally they got ready to cut off his head. At that time Mother Goddess Kali Herself appeared from the deity, chopped off the heads of the entire gang and saved him. We don't know where he went from there.

But the story is picked up by Shuka in another scene. There was one King of Sauvira country, by name Rahugana. He had great intentions to have spirituality lessons from Kapila Muni and so he travelled, carried in a palanquin, to the northwest corner of this country in the hope of meeting Kapila. On the way, one of his eight palanquin-bearers became unable to do his duty and so they needed a substitute. They looked for one and they found our JaDa-bharata roaming about as if for no purpose. Again his robustness and youth attracted them and he was used as the substitute palanquin bearer.

The strength of the *vAsanA*s that one inherits from the actions of the past is very great. Noble Sadhus, particularly in the Sannyasa-Ashrama, are so careful even while they walk to see they don't trample on a living creature. It is an extreme discipline of this kind which is one of the reasons they have *cAturmasya-vrata* (the vrata during the rainy season of four months), the observance of which requires them, among other things, to stay in the same place and carry on their daily worship or meditation routine. Our JaDabharata must have gone through such disciplines in his previous lives. That *VAsanA*

of ahimsA (non-violence) was so strong in him that as he was walking along carrying the palanquin of King Rahugana in the woods, now and then he jumped forward, still carrying the portion of the palanquin resting on his right shoulder. The jumping was to avoid trampling on some small crawling creature on the ground below. But this jumping of one of the bearers, without the concordant activity or consent of the other bearers, naturally created a sudden jolt and jerk to the occupant of the palanquin. The King opened his window, looked out, and faulted the bearers for jolting him like that. All seven of them said it was not their fault; it was the newcomer who joined them just a little while ago who was jumping out of step unnecessarily!.

And that was the starting point of a remarkable dialogue between the King Rahughana and our hero JaDa-Bharata. The King chastises him in a satirical way, referring to his robust health and youth. When a second time this chastisement happens, JaDabharata, for the first time in his life, opens his mouth and says:

My dear King, whatever you have spoken sarcastically is certainly true. Actually these are not simply words of chastisement, for the body is the carrier. The load carried by the body does not belong to me. There is no contradiction in your statements because I am different from the body. I am not the carrier of the palanquin; the body is the carrier. Certainly, as you have hinted, I have not labored carrying the palanquin, for I am detached from the body. Your words about my stoutness or otherwise are befitting a person who does not know the distinction between the body and the soul. The body may be fat or thin, but no learned man would say such things of the *Atman*. As far as the *Atman* is concerned, I am neither fat nor skinny; therefore you are correct when you say that I am not very stout. Also, if the object of this journey and the path leading there were mine, there would be many troubles for me, but because they relate not to me but to my body, there is no trouble at all.

Fatness, thinness, bodily and mental distress, thirst, hunger, fear, disagreement, desires for material happiness, old age, sleep, attachment for material possessions, anger, lamentation, illusion and identification of the body with the self are all transformations of the material covering of the *Atman*. Only a person who has identified himself with his body is affected by these things. Consequently I am neither fat nor skinny nor anything else you have mentioned. My dear King, you have unnecessarily accused me of being dead though alive. In this regard, I can only say that this is the case everywhere because everything material has its beginning and end. As far as your thinking that you are the king and master and are thus trying to order me, this is also incorrect because these positions are temporary. Today you are a king and I am your servant, but tomorrow the position may be changed, and you may be my servant and I your master. These are temporary circumstances. The differentiation is temporary, and it expands only from usage or convention. I do not see any other cause. In that case, who is the master, and who is the servant? Nonetheless, if you think that you are the master and that I am the servant, I shall accept this. Please order me. What can I do for you? You said you are going to punish me severely. What will you gain by punishing me? You will be only punishing my body; but I have actually punished this body by never tending to it. You are only powdering the already powdered chaff. There will be no effect.

The King was stunned and amazed when he heard this. He jumped from the palanquin, fell at the feet of JaDabharata and asked for being taught spiritual wisdom. There ensues then a three-chapter dialogue between the King and JaDabharata containing the essence of advaita. The King asks questions and JaDabharata answers them meticulously. This portion in the BhA. is one of the most treasured pieces in the whole work

4. Dhruva-stuti

This is the pinnacle of praise on the Absolute, spoken out by the five-year old Dhruva, right in the presence of Lord *Vishnu* who not only appeared before him in recognition of his severe penance but also sparked him on to speak by touching his right cheek with His divine Conch, the Conch which overflows with Vedic wisdom. This is an extraordinary piece of 12 verses occurring in the 4th *skanda* of BhA.. Though the BhA. contains many such hymns in praise of the Lord, this one has a unique place , because it was given out by the blessed little boy who first dared not speak a word but was immediately prompted from within by the Absolute Itself. In this sense this hymn is the pinnacle of praise. It may be supposed to be the authentic voice of the Lord Himself on Himself. Naturally it contains the cream of all vedic and vedantic teaching. Usually exponents of BhA. do not find the time to go into this fully in their expositions. They concentrate only on the first verse. We shall go through all of them verse by verse. Each verse is given in original, followed by a translation and a commentary.

Shloka 1

y'ontaH praviSya mama vAcaM imAm prasuptAM
sanjIvayaty-akhila-Shakti-dharas svadhAmnA /
anyAMSca hasta caraNa-SravaNa-tvagAdhIn
prANAn-namo bhagavate purushAya tubhyaM //

My Lord, I make my prostrations to You. You are the One who has entered into me as my inner soul making me speak. My speech has been dormant all along. You are the One who makes my ears hear, my hands work, my feet walk, my tactile senses to feel, my life to vibrate - all by your Glory, my Lord, who wields Infinite Power.

The very first verse, hits right on the dot, at the central core of Hindu philosophy, namely, the Immanence of the Absolute. This principle is such a distinguishing feature of Hinduism that it can be said to be the essence of the whole religion. The words '*antaH praviSya*' (= entered into) go back to the vedic source:

'Having created the world, He entered it; Having entered it, He became the Truth as well as the opposite of it--
tat sRshtvA / tad-evAnu-prAviSat /tad-anu-praviSya / saccatyaccA-bhavat // - T.U.

Here the 'entering' has to be understood carefully. It is not as if the world was separate from Him and *then* He entered it. He is the world and so there is no question of 'entering' it. The 'entering' is an understatement due to paucity of words in the language. This is

where words fail, even for the Upanishads, to describe Him and His glories. The commentators emphasize the prefix '*anu*' in the word '*anu-praviSya*' in the Upanishad and say this is an indication of the characteristic of Immanence (= *antar-vyApti*) of the Lord; it is not a physical 'entering' or a 'becoming' but it is a case of 'being'. The Lord is within us ever from Creation.

> Incidentally this is the reason why, in Hinduism, man is not basically a sinner but is essentially divine; the sinner in him is his acquired mind. And this is also the reason why, every one is redeemable if only he tunes himself with the Spirit within. And this is also the spiritual and religious reason why, even in secular life we should respect the dignity of Man and give him his due.

This whole universe has Him as its Life-spirit, says the Lord in the *Gita* (VII - 5):

jIva-bhUtAm mahA-bAho yayedam dhAryate jagat **.**

There are two facets of the Spiritual Energy, the Energy of the Lord. One is called the Supreme (*parA-*) and the other is not-so-supreme (*aparA-*). The former is the one which gives life to all beings. And the latter is what makes matter what it is. This latter is made up of the five elements plus Mind plus Intellect plus Ego - these constitute the eight-fold *aparA- prakRti* as it is technically called. *PrakRti*, is simply the Cosmic Energy of the Lord. The *parA-prakRti* is what makes our life tick. The infinitesimal fragment of this *parA-prakRti* is the life in us. It is what makes this material body and mind have life, it is what rejuvenates our senses, it is what enlivens them, in short, without it there is no life. So Dhruva says: You are the One who are making me speak, you are the one who is making my eyes see and so on. Otherwise; I did not know how and what to talk. You are the one who has given life (*sanjIvayati*) to my speech and made me give out this poem of praise. All this you are doing by your *dhAma*, i.e., your own Glory, Your Majesty and Your Will. To such a life-giving principle as you are, I make my prostrations.

And he uses the word *namaH* as anybody would do in this context. The word *namaH* in Sanskrit has an esoteric connotation. In simple terms it means 'prostration'. But that is only in the translation, *which is convenient, but not faithful*. The combination of the syllables *na* and *ma* in the word has been interpreted by scholars to denote the self-negating expression *na-ma-ma*, which means, 'not mine'. In fact it is even declared that there is a significance in the syllable '*na*' *preceding* the syllable '*ma*'; Man is so so feeble-minded and so possessive that if he says '*ma*' first, which signifies 'mine' he may not have the heart to say '*na*' (signifying negation) later! This expression of humility before the Lord has to be repeated infinite number of times so that it may get into our system and serve as a *vAsanA*, even in our next lives.

So even when we ordinarily say *namaH* to someone, the polite greeting implied in the prostration is only an outer decoration, whereas the real significance of the usage of the word *namaH* is to say that we are making prostration to the divinity which is resident in the other person as much as it is resident in us. 'Prostration to you' (the ordinary usage of *namaste*, which is nothing but *namaH* + *te*) actually signifies 'Prostration to the Divinity in you'. It must be said to the credit of Hinduism that this fact of Divinity being

immanent in every living being has been inconspicuously but inextricably interwoven with a daily habit of greeting each other. More so, when one offers worship to the Almighty the word *namaH* gets added significance because it constantly reminds us that what we possess is not ours, it is all His. Very compassionately therefore, the Upanishad says:

If one worships Him with *namaH*, at his feet do desires prostrate.
taM nama ity-upAsIta / namyante'smai kAmAH //
taittirIya-Upanishad.

meaning, desires obey him who worships God with the word *namaH*. Usually it is the desires that control us and make us their slaves. If only we can find a way of desires listening to us and our discretion, half the battle is won. This is exactly where the Upanishads become most relevant to daily life. Worship Him with *namaH*, says the Upanishad -- then you will not have to worry about your desires. Strategically, then, this is the Way!

Shloka 2

ekas-tvameva bhagavan-nidam Atma-SaktyA
mAyAkhyayoru-guNayA mahad-AdyaSeshaM /
sRshTvA-nuviSya purushas-tadasad-guNeshu
nAneva dArushu vibhAvasuvad-vibhAsi //

You are just one, O Lord, but by your own Power called *mAyA Shakti* consisting of the three *guNas*, you have caused the *mahat* principle and all its successor phenomena. Having thus created and entered all the diverse forms (as their inner Light) you appear as many, even as fire appears as diverse in different logs of burning wood.

mAyA the projecting Power, is the first sprouting from the Lord. In the scientific world we think it is the big bang that was the first event in the cosmic evolution of things. You are not supposed to ask what went on before the big bang. In Vedanta *mAyA* is the origin of everything including the explicit manifestation of Time (= *kAla*). It is that which projects this universe and hides the Reality. The Reality is called sat. What we see or experience in the form of the universe is (relatively) unreal and so is called asat. The three constituents of *mAyA*, namely, the three guNas (satva, rajas, and tamas), make up the universe. So the substratum of these unreal objects is the Reality of the Absolute. The Lord through his *mAyA* has projected the universe and has 'entered' it. It is significant that the vedic word '*anu-viSya*' itself is used here signifying the immanence of the Absolute . That is why the entire teaching of the philosophy boils down to the formula: What you see as the universe is, in reality, *Brahman*, not the universe. Put in a more simplistic way this says: It is God that is everywhere. All religions say that God is everywhere. But the immanence theory of Hinduism says much more, namely, there is nothing but God anywhere. Even when we see the Sun shining, it is not the Sun that is the Agent for the shining, but it is the Almighty that is shining through the physical object called the Sun; (*Gita* 15 - 12):

yadAditya gataM tejo jagad-bhAsayate'khilam /
yac-candramasi yaccAgnau tat-tejo viddhi mAmakaM //

That Light which is residing in the Sun and which illumines
the whole world, and that which is in the moon and in the fire-
know that Light to be Mine

One of the standard *mantra*s that is repeated when we wave the lighted Arti before the Lord at the end of ritual worship, says in Sv.U.:.6-14

tameva bhAntam anubhAti sarvaM
tasya bhAsA sarvam-idam vibhAti
Everything owes its existence to His Existence;
all that shines shines because of His Light.

The same idea is expressed in the thought that the Self is the Light within and it is because of that Light we see what we see and we feel what we feel. The illuminating analogy for this is a lamp placed within a covered basket (or pot) with several holes in it. The light from within the enclosure of the pot passes through the holes and lights up the outside. We are told by the scriptures that the physical universe that we see is the manifestation of the Light within us, namely the Self. (See the 4th verse in the Hymn to the *Guru*)

The Ultimate Supreme is the only one that gives the sanction for the expression of anything in the world, whether animate or inanimate. By itself the Supreme has no name or form. But since it is immanent in everything, it appears as the diverse objects of the universe. Fire shows itself in various forms, depending on the size and shape of the object which burns . So also the Lord appears now as this and now as that depending on what object we are looking at. cf. *Ka.U.* : (II - ii - 9):

agnir-yathaiko bhuvanaM pratishTo
rUpaM rUpaM prati-rUpo babhUva /
ekastathA sarva-bhUtAntarAtmA
rUpam rUpaM prati-rUpo bahiSca //
Just as fire, though one, having entered the world,
assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes,
similarly, the Self, inside all beings, though one,
assumes a form in respect of each shape; and (yet) it is outside.

The Upanishads do not tire in giving analogies. For more analogies on how this Universe has *Brahman* immanent in it, without *Brahman* undergoing any changes by itself or in itself, see the Chapter on 'Absolute As It is'.

Shloka 3

tvad-dattayA vayunayedam acashTa viSvam
supta-prabhuddha iva nAtha bhavat-prapannaH /
tasyApavargya-SaraNaM tava pAda-mUlaM
vismaryate kRta-vidA katham Arta-bandho //

> O Lord, O friend of the distressed! You gave the vision to Lord Brahma who thereby visualised the universe (to be created by Him) as one who woke up from sleep. How can one forget your divine feet which is the sole refuge even for those who are liberated?

Before we proceed further we need to have a little introduction to the remaining verses. The whole hymn is in praise of *Brahman*. But *Brahman* is not describable in words, say the scriptures. In fact they describe it only in negatives, such as: it cannot be indicated, it cannot be related, it cannot be specified by categories, it cannot be delimited by characteristics, and so on. So how do you then glorify the *Brahman* or describe it in a hymn? And here the Lord Himself is doing it through the mouth of Dhruva. So first *Brahman* is described in terms of *taTastha-lakshaNa,* i.e. in terms of definitions which are only indicative, not specific. In other words, instead of directly pointing out to *Brahman* which is a tall order, even for the vedas, one looks at the created universe and infers the Almighty behind. Thus verse Nos. 3 to 9 indicate *Brahman* by dwelling on its creative power rather than its essential nature as It is. The *svarUpa-lakshaNa*, definition-as-it-is, is taken up in verses 10 and 11. It is interesting to note that, this little boy who is giving out this hymn, has put so much organization into this poem of praise, by separating the two ways in which *Brahman* is traditionally referred. Rightly may we conisder the poem as an inspired one coming out of his mouth by the inspiration through the vedas which the divine Conch passed on to him. It was You who gave the divine sight to the Creator Himself to recall how He did the Creation in the previous cycle. Let us note here that the Hindu theory of Creation and Dissolution is a phenomenon of recurring cycles. Once Creation starts it is Brahma's day. When everything dissolves in the Infinite Absolute the day-time of Brahma is over and Brahma 'sleeps' as it were. The next morning there is another day of manifestation, that is, creation - which will end up in Brahma's evening by another dissolution. Each such day of Brahma is called one *kalpa*. On the beginning of every such day, it is the Lord that has to 'sanctify' Brahma with the necessary spiritual power to create the universe.

The words '*tvad-dattayA*' are significant. It is the Lord that sanctioned the Creator Brahma the knowledge of the Vedas which are eternal. How does a new-born child get the knowledge and strategy to suck the milk out of the mother's breast? It is a *vAsanA* from previous births, granted by the Lord. Maybe Science will one day isolate the gene that is responsible for the capability of the child to suck milk. (Probably, it has, already). But even then, is that the end of all questions? Why does that gene have that property? What or Who gave it that property? This kind of questioning will continue for ever in the scientific world. It is only an infinite regression. Ultimately after every finite stage of our knowledge we have to end up with the concept of '*tvad-dattayA*' (given by You, Oh Lord). This is a sound illustration of the *taTastha-lakshaNa* that is being elaborated in these verses. We cannot see Him through ordinary perception but it is He that is the ultimate reservoir and source of everything that we think we know or do. In mathematical terms we may describe the relation between Science with its understanding of the universe on the one hand and God the almighty on the other hand as follows in terms of the two *lakshaNas, taTastha-lakshaNa* and *svarUpa-lakshaNa*. The latter is given by the scriptures as *satyam-jnAnam-anantam brahma (See* the Absolute As It Is*)*. The former is only an approximation, given by scientific understanding of the

universe as of a particular time. It is like summing up an infinite series in mathematics. In Mathematics we know that, for instance,

$$1 + 1/1 + 1/2 + 1/6 + 1/24 + 1/120 + 1/720 + ... + 1/n! + ... = e$$

This simply means that the infinite series on the left sums up to a number called '*e*'. This latter number is a very important but complicated number. Its value lies between 2 and 3. Its actual value has infinite number of decimal places. Now if you take 10 terms of the above series and actually add them up you will get a number approximately equal to *e*. If you take 100 terms and sum up again, you will get a better approximation to the same *e*. Thus the larger the number of terms of the series you take and add up, the better you get an approximation to *e*. But whatever number of terms you take, even if it be in millions you will *never* get the actual value of the number *e*. This is what is happening in the approximation of Science to Spiritual Reality. However forward Science may move in terms of understanding Reality, there will be questions at the end for which you will have to resort to the concept of '*tvad-dattayA*'!

Shloka 4

nUnaM vimushTa-matayas-tava mAyayA te
ye tvAm bhavApyaya-vimokshaNam-anya-hetoH /
arcanti kalpaka-taruM kuNapopa-bhogyaM
icchanti yat-sparSajaM niraye'pi nRNAM //

You are the One who can grant the release from birth and death. But if people worship you for other benefits and ask you, who are a wish-fulfilling tree, material pleasures to be experienced by the body, which is itself no better than a corpse, their intelligence has certainly been confounded by *mAyA*; because the material pleasures can be experienced even in hell.

We are all of crooked intelligence, says this verse. Why? The Lord is a wish-fulfilling tree who can give even the final release from births and deaths. Instead of asking this of the Lord we ask from him all sorts of mundane transitory realities. Remember, Dhruva came to the forest to do penance, to see the Lord and ask of Him how he can get onto the lap of his father - the 'privilege' denied to him by his step-mother. But now, the very Lord that is speaking through him has probably made him forget that mundane triviality.

The most significant word in this verse is *bhavApyaya-vimokshaNaM,* meaning 'the release from birth (*bhava*) and death (*apyaya*)'. On the face of it this means the release from the transmigratory cycle. But it means more. It means release from three bondages which cause this transmigratory whirl. They are *kartRtvaM* (the feeling that I am the doer), *bhoktRtvaM* (the feeling that I am the experiencer) and *ajnAnaM* (Ignorance of the Reality). The first one is the series of thoughts like: I did this , therefore I am meritorious; I did that, therefore I am sinful. The second one is the series of thoughts like: I am happy; I am sorrowful. These two feelings of agency as the doer and agency as the experiencer are caused by a further root cause, namely Ignorance. This Ignorance is that of not knowing the Self as different from the body-mind-intellect. It superimposes the

things that pertain to the body-mind-intellect on the Self behind. The Release that is talked about in the verse is the release from these three basic causes of *samsAra*. The fact that we are of such crooked intelligence is itself due to the play of *mAyA*. Otherwise why did Man eat the apple in the Garden of Eden? Recall the Lord's saying "By the delusion of pairs of opposites arising from desire and aversion, all beings are subject to delusion at birth" - B.G. 7 – 27:

icchA-dvesha-samutthena dvandva-mohena bhArata /
sarva-bhUtAn sam-mohaM sarge yAnti param-tapa //i

The three bondages mentioned above constitute a vicious cycle that is exactly the doing of the *mAyA*. The latter is nothing but *prakRti* working in the presence of the Lord. cf. *Gita*: 9 - 10:

mayA-dhyaksheNa prakRtiH sUyate sa-carAcaraM
In My supervision and control, *prakRti* produces
the moving and unmoving world.

Shloka 5

yA nirvRtis-tanu-bhRtAM tava pAda-padma-
dhyAnAd-bhavajjana-kathASravaNena vA syAt /
sA brahmaNi sva-mahimanyapi nAtha mA bhUt
kiM tvantakAsi lulitAt-patatAM vimAnAt //

What bliss one gains by meditating on your lotus feet or by listening to the stories of your devotees, that bliss is not obtainable even in the experience of *Brahman*; what to speak of those who are catapulting down the abyss caused by the eternal sword of Time?

So far the Lord has been indicated by His *taTastha-lakshaNa*. Before we go to the *svarUpa-lakshaNa* in the 10th verse, the hymn swings the thought process to *bhakti* - which is the only path to understand Him as He is and what He is. cf. *Gita* (18- 55):

bhaktyA mAm abhijAnAti yAvAn-yaScAsmi tatvataH
By Devotion one understands Me
as to What I am and Who I am.

This verse is one of the earliest authorities, in terms of the cosmic chronology of events, for the concept of *bhakti* as the most ideal path to *moksha*. It extols *bhakti* over and above even the so-called experience of the Absolute State of enlightenment, denoted by the glorious name of *brahma-anubhavaM*. The Bliss that arises from that transcendental state is spoken of as the Infinite Bliss in all scriptures and by all great seers. Here Dhruva says even that pales into insignificance before the bliss that one enjoys in the three major activities of devotion, namely, Meditation of His form in the mind, Singing by the mouth in praise of His Glories, and Bowing by the body to Him in obeisance. cf. *V.S.* - preliminary verses:

dhyAyan-stuvan-namsyamSca
meditating, praising and bowing

The mind that attaches to God automatically liberates. The thesis here is that such a mind is already experience the transcendental experience of bliss, it need not wait for the so-called *mukti.* Listen to Adi Shankara: (S.L.: 81).

kamcit-kAlam-umAmaheSa bhavataH pAdAravindArcanaiH
kamcit-dhyAna-samAdhibhiSca natibhiH kamcit kathA-karNanaiH /
kamcit-kamcid-avekshaNaiSca nutibhiH kamcid-daSAmIdRSIM
yaH prApnoti mudA tvad-arpita-manA jIvan sa muktaH khalu //

Sometime in worshipping Your lotus feet, sometime in meditation and concentration sometime in offering obeisance, sometime in listening to stories about You, sometime in looking at Your form, sometime in singing Your praise- he who gains such a state in exhultation, having surrendered his mind to You, O Lord, he is verily liberated even when alive.

Listen again to Adi Shankara from the same S.L.33:

nAlaM vA sakRdeva deva bhavataH sevA natir vA nutiH
pUjA vA smaraNaM kathA-ShravaNaM-apy-AlokanaM mAdRSAM /
svamin-nasthira-devatAnusaraNAyAsena kiM labhyate
kA vA mukti-ritaH kuto bhavati cet kiM prArthanIyaM tadA //

O God, what is to be gained by following with effort, gods who are impermanent? O Lord, is it not enough for people like me to serve you even once through making obeisance, singing Your praise,worship, meditation, listening to stories about you or having a *darSan* of You? What else is *moksha* other than this? (Even if there be) what am I then supposed to pray to you for?

Shloka 6

bhaktiM muhuH pravahatAM tvayi me prasango
bhUyAd-ananta-mahatAM amalASayAnAM /
yenAnjasolbaNam-uruvyasanaM bhavAbdhiM
neshye bhavad-guNa-kathAmRta-pAna-mattaH //

May my association be with those noble souls whose minds are pure and in whom *bhakti* is overflowing incessantly. By that very association I will easily cross dangerous and sorrowful ocean of *samsAra*, intoxicated as I will be with the nectar of the stories of Your Glory.

This sets up the tradition of *sat-sangh*, the association with noble souls. In all of Hindu religious literature (and there is no reason to suppose it is otherwise in other religious literature) the value of such association is never superseded by any other religious value. It is the only force which inexorably produces the attachment to the divine. The very strange and powerfully distracting (*ulbaNam*) abyss of *samsAra* can be crossed very easily (*anjasA*) by the spiritualising effect of sharing of the Lord's stories and exploits with like-minded souls of devotion. Every one of their activities, consciously done or unconsciously, is an eloquent expression of the surge of divine love and proclaim it to the whole world. They are like the neem tree which purifies the very air we breathe. That is why Narada confidently says, (N.B.S.68):

kaNTAvarodha-romAncASrubhiH
parasparaM lapamAnAH pAvayanti kulAni pRthVIMca //

Conversing with one another with choking voice, tearful eyes, and horripilation, they purify not only their families but the land which gave birth to them.

Shloka 7

te na smarantyatitarAM priyamISa martyaM
ye cAnvadas-suta-suhRd-gRha-vitta-dArAH /
ye tvabja-nAbha-bhavadIya-padAra-vinda-
saugandhya-lubdha-hRdayeshu kRta-prasangAH //

Oh Padmanabha! They do not get involved in the memory of either their mortal body, or its necessary accessories as kith and kin, friend and foe, property, money and spouse; because they are already immersed in the association with noble souls whose minds are lost in the fragrance of Your divine feet.

This verse characterises divine love, also called Spiritual Love The finest example of this was that of the *gopi*s to Lord Krishna. cf..X-30-44:

tan-manaskAs-tadAlApAH tad-viceShTAs-tadAtmikAH /
tadguNAn-eva gAyantyaH nAtmAgArANi sasmaruH //

Their hearts given to Him, they talked of Him alone, they imitated His sportful activities, they could not think of themselves as different from Him. Singing His glories all the time, they could not think of their own homes.

The *Gita* praises this kind of spiritual Love as the Acme of *bhakti* . It refers to this as total involvement and complete commitment to the Divine, in *Gita* (5 - 17):

tadbuddhayas-tadAtmAnaH tannishTAs-tat-parAyaNAH /
gachanty-apunarAvRttiM jnAna-nirdhUta-kalmashAH //

> Intellect absorbed in That Absolute, their Self being That Itself, established in That Self, with That for their supreme Goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge.

It would be quite appropriate here to recall the classic instance from the Ramayana where Sita, left alone as Ravana's captive in the Asoka grove, is counting days in the expectation that Her Lord would one day come and redeem her. This is how Hanuman who, having located her from his hiding place on the trees, describes her state of spiritual yearning for the One Spiritual absolute, Rama. (V.R.: 5 - 16-25):

naishA paSyati rAkshasyo nemAn pushpa-phala-drumAn /
ekastha-hRdayA nUnaM Ramam-evAnupaSyati //

> She does not see the *rAkshasis* nor does she see these trees laden with flowers and fruits. Her heart is centred on one single object (alone) and she is undoubtedly seeing Rama and Rama alone all the time.

Shloka 8

tiryang-naga-dvija-sarI-sRpa-deva-daitya-
martyAdibhiH paricitaM sad-asad-viSeshaM /
rUpaM sthavishTaM aja te mahad-AdyanekaM
nAtaH paraM parama vedmi na yatra vAdaH //

> Oh Ultimate One! The Birthless One! I know only this magnificent material form of Yours which has causes like *mahat* and the like, which is full of gross and subtle elements and which is constituted by the world of animals, mountains, trees, birds, reptiles, gods, demons and humans. I do not know that which transcends all words, (that which is behind all these).

Dhruva comes back to the *taTastha-lakshaNa* but now refers to the Transcendence aspect of the Lord. Verses 1 and 2 emphasized the Immanence aspect, verse 3 started the *taTastha -lakshaNa*, verses 4 to 7 were overcome with the *bhakti* aspect which that *taTastha-lakshaNa* prompted and he now continues the *taTastha-lakshaNa*. And in recalling the transcendence aspect of the Lord he points to the dizzy heights of philosophy in the same way one points to the Transcendental Absolute by the indicative character of the *taTastha-lakshaNa*. He says in so many words; I see You in the universe but I don't see You who are transcending the universe. In saying this he is echoing the sentiments expressed in the famous *nAsadIya-sUkta* of Rg-veda. We quote below from the corresponding portion of the yajur veda, where there is almost a repetition of the *nAsadIya-sUkta*:

ko addhA veda ka iha pravocat / kuta AjAtA kuta iyam visRshTiH //
arvAg devA asya visarjane na / athA ko veda yata AbabhUva //
iyam visRshTir-yata AbabhUva / yadi vAdadhe yadi vA na //
yo asyA-dhyakshaH parame vyoman / so anga veda yadi vA na veda //

> Who verily knows and who can declare it? Whence it was born ,and whence this manifold creation sprang? The lower gods who came later into being would not know. Does the Creator, from whom everything came, know? Does He

> know whether it was His will or not that formed it? The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven, He verily knows it -- or perchance He knows not.

So Dhruva says: This entire universe, animate and inanimate, the gross as well as the subtle is pervaded by you, but You are said to transcend everything. You are said to be beyond words. Of the five elements, Earth, Water and fire can be visually seen - these constitute the *sat*; Air and Space cannot be visually seen - these constitute the *asat*. The entire universe is made up of the *sat* and the *asat*. But You are beyond both. Also *sat* represents the concrete effect, namely the Space and the other elements. And *asat* represents the subtle Cause behind, like the Unmanifest. You transcend both. Thus You are beyond Cause and Effect. You are not comprehensible by words. You cannot be delimited by finite expressions. Such a one as You are is beyond me. What I see is what I know.

Dhruva is only giving expression to the Rgvedic thought which has now become classical - namely, the relationship between the universe and God, that is, the question whether originally there was Existence (*sat)* or non-Existence (*asat*), is undecidable (*anirvacanIyaM*) because,

yukti-dRshTyA-tvanirvAcyaM nAsadAsIditi SruteH /
nAsadAsIt vibhAtatvAt nosadAsIcca-bAdhanAt //
(*PanchadaSI* : 6 – 128)

> By human logic it is undecidable. The *nAsadIya sUkta* also says so. Originally it could not have been non-existence, because now it exists; it could not have been Existence, because the universe came into being later and that means whatever that existed has changed.

Shloka 9

kalpAnta etad-akhilaM jaTareNa gRhNan
Sete pumAn svadRg-ananta-sakhas-tad-anke /
yannAbhi-sindhu-ruha-kAncana-loka-padma-
garbhe-dyumAn bhagavate praNato'smi tasmai //

> I prostrate before the Lord, the *Purusha*, who is fixed in His own Self, who absorbs the entire universe at the end of the *kalpa* in His own stomach, who sleeps on the folds of AdiSesha, his friend, and in Whose navel rises the stem of the Golden Lotus from which Brahma came out.

The phenomenon of the Lord withdrawing everything unto Himself at the end of the *kalpa* and releasing them at the beginning of the next morning of Brahma is mentioned in all the Hindu scriptures. cf. *Gita*: 9 - 7:

sarva-bhUtAni kaunteya prakRtiM yAnti mAmikAM /
kalpa-kshaye punastAni kalpAdau visRjAmy-ahaM //

> All beings go into My *prakRti* at the end of a *kalpa*; I send them forth again at the beginning of the (next) *kalpa*.

The words *kAncana-loka-padma-garbe* are significant. The Creator Brahma woke up in the stem of the golden lotus which sprang from the navel of the Lord. For this reason he is also called *hiraNya-garbha* (Golden Conception). As *HiraNya-garbha* He has a great charge, namely, the charge of the golden container representing the reservoir of all our *vAsanAs*. This is the one that brings forth our repeated births in the transmigratory cycle, so that we may exhaust our *vAsanAs*. But instead of exhausting them we add further to the reservoir. And naturally the true phase of Reality is hidden from us because of the opaqueness of the reservoir of our *vAsanAs*. The I.U. therefore contains almost as its last verse a prayer to the Sun-God, who represents this *hiraNya-garbha*, to give us the vision to transcend our individuality brought on us by our *vAsanAs.* A meaning of significance of this prayer is contained in the sub-section on Raghavendra in the Chapter 'The Guru'.

Shloka 10

tvaM nitya-mukta-pariSuddha-vibuddha AtmA
kUtastha Adi-purusho bhagavAn-stryadhISaH/
yad-buddhy-avasthitim-akhaNDitayA svadRshTyA
drashTA sthitA-vadhimakho vyatirikta Asse //

> You are ever-liberated, perfectly pure, the Omniscient Self, the Immutable, the most Ancient Person, the One with all divine attributes, the Lord of the three worlds and guNas. You, though being the uninterrupted Witness, by your Cosmic Vision, of the state of intelligence and also the Lord of all sacrifices, are ever aloof from the *jIva*, the individual soul.

Now we come to the *svarUpa-lakshaNa* of the Lord. As explained in 'The Absolute As It Is', *satyam jnAnaM anantaM* is the definition of the Transcendental Absolute. *satyam* (Truth) is the same as sat (Absolute Existence). *jnAnaM* (Knowledge) and *cit* (Consciousness) are the same. *anantaM* Infinite) and *Ananda* (Bliss) are the same. These three facets are presented in *EACH* of the lines (lines 1, 2 and 4) of this 10th verse of *Dhruva-stuti.* Since the *GAyatrI* itself is a presentation of these three facets of the Absolute in its three lines, this 10th verse is taken to represent the *GAyatrI*.

For the above reason, it is said that those who do not have the privilege of being inducted into the *GAyatrI* can take this verse and recite it and use it for meditation purposes; and they will have the same benefit as they would if they had done the *GAyatrI*. This is the *mantra* power of this verse.

This interpretation beautifully dovetails with the description by commentators of *Dhruva-stuti* as representing the 12 *Adityas*, namely the twelve manifestations of the Sun-God. These twelve are, in order,

mitra, ravi, sUrya, bhAnu, khaga, pUsha, hiraNya-garbha, marIci, Aditya, savitA, arka, and bhAskara.

The relevant one here is *savitA*. It is the tenth facet. Each verse of *Dhruva-stuti* represents one of these. The manifestation *savitA* is represented by the tenth verse, namely the

present one. *savitA* is the manifestation that is deified in the *GAyatrI* as representative of the absolute. Thus this tenth verse is representative of *savitA,* therefore of gAyatrI. Each epithet introduced here by Dhruva deserves elaborate comments. We shall attempt to give only a few.

kUTastha : The Immutable or The Immovable; that which remains like the unchanging iron-piece (anvil) on which the blacksmith does all his hammering. In Vedanta literature *kUTastha* is used to denote the *akshara purusha,* the imperishable Self , who is the changeless non-participating witness of the doings of the outer self. The outer Self, which is called the *kshara purusha*, 'the perishable Self', is involved in the actions of Nature, reflects the varied workings of the *guNas* of the individual's *prakRti*. This outer Self identifies himself with the play of personality and assumes the doer-ship of all actions. He is under the constant spell of *mAyA;* whereas the *akshara purusha*, the *kuTastha*, is the inactive non-doer and is only the witnessing Self. It is the Lord that appears as both the *purushas*.

drashTA : The seer. Actually this word has to go along with the entire third line, meaning: He who watches, uninterruptedly, by His own Cosmic Vision, the state of intelligence. But He never undergoes any *vikAra* (transformation) because of what He sees. cf. *Br.U.* (4-3-23):

na hi drashTur-dRsTer-viparilopo vartate, avinASitvAt
Indeed there cannot be any impact of
the seen or the seeing on the Seer,
because the latter is immutable.

He is actually the *kUTastha* or the *akshara purusha* witnessing everything. It is because of this existence of a continuous witness, that the outer Self when it goes to sleep along with its body, mind and intellect, has however a memory of the sleeping act ('I slept soundly and happily') when it wakes up after sleep. This is a daily phenomenon that happens without our noticing it carefully. In *yajur-veda, taittirIya-AraNyaka*, 10 - 1- 67 there is a *mantra*:

aham-eva-aham-mAM-juhomi svAhA /
I make myself (the finite self) an oblation into the fire
of the infinite *Brahman* which I am always.

This *mantra*, truly enunciates the refunding of the individual self into its source, the Supreme Self, or the realisation of the identity between the *jIva* and the *ISvara* when the adjuncts created by ignorance are removed (by the oblation of the lower self into the Fire of the Higher Self). The outer Self goes and 'merges' as it were with the Inner Self during sleep and that is what makes it conscious of the sleep *after the event.* It is this daily event that is the proof of the theory that the *kshara purusha* and the *akshara purusha* are essentially the same.

tryadhISaH : The simple meaning is 'Lord of the Three'. Here the 'three' could be any one of several possibilities. In fact every such possibility is so apt for the Lord that all of them

apply and that is what makes the epithet one of the richest epithets for the description of the Lord. He is Lord of the three worlds. He is Lord of the three *guNas*, meaning, He transcends them. So He is *guNAtIta*. He is Lord of the Trinity - meaning, He is the absolute of whom each of the Trinity is only a manifestration. He is the Lord of the past, the present and the future - *bhUta-bhavya-bhavat-prabhuH*. He is Lord of the three states of Consciousness - waking, dreaming and sleeping; in other words, He is the fourth state of Consciousness, that transcends the three and is the substratum for all three. In the same manner He is represented by the silence that follows the three syllables '*a*' '*u*' and '*m*' in the chanting of '*aum'*. He is the One who is sung by the three vedas. He is the One who is attained by the three yogic paths - *karma, bhakti* and *jnAna*. He is the One who is 'born' in all the three *yugas*. He is the One who has three eyes. He is the One who made three strides to span the three worlds.

vyatirikta Asse: The Inner Self which is the *akshara purusha* also known as *kUTastha* is totally unaffected by any of the concepts that are generally known to create differences between individual and individual, namely, *jAti* (= species, like bird or reptile animal or human, man or woman), *kriyA* (= nature of work or profession), *guNa* (= quality, like white or black, lean or stout, short or tall, etc.) and *sambandha* (= relationship, like rich or poor, possessor of property or not). So He stands aloof from everything that individualises the outer self! He is the substratum or the base. Everything else is a superposition. The *adhishTAna* (base) has always the extra status (*adhika-sthAna*), both in terms of time and in terms of existence. For a pot made of clay, clay is the base; the pot lives for lesser time than the clay of which it is made. The Seen is superimposed on the Seer, *drashTA*. No doubt the latter stands aloof. Rightly does the great Acharya (Adi-Shankara) proclaim:

aham nirvikalpo nirAkAra-rUpo
vibhutvAcca sarvatra sarvendriyANAM /
na cAsangataM naiva bandho na mokshaH
cidAnanda-rUpaH Sivo'ham Sivo'haM //

I never change, I am without form,
I permeate everywhere and every sense;
No attachment binds me, I am not in bondage and so I have no need for liberation, I am always free; I am Consciousness, I am Bliss, I am *Shiva*.

Shloka 11

yasmin viruddha-gatayo hyaniSam patanti
vidyAdayo vividha-Saktaya Anu-pUrvyAt /
tad-brahma viSva-bhavam-ekam-anantam-AdyaM
Ananda-mAtram-avikAram-ahaM prapadye //

From You do contradictory powers like *vidyA* and *avidyA* emanate in continuous succession. You are the Source of the Universe, You are the One, You are the Infinite. You are the First. You are nothing but Bliss. To You *Brahman*, my salutations.

Dhruva winds up here by bringing in both the *taTastha-lakshaNa* and the *svarUpa-lakshaNa*. The emanation of powers like *vidyA* as well as *avidyA* and the fact He is the source of the Universe point to *Brahman* by *taTastha-lakshaNa*. All the other epithests in this verse bring in the Absolute As It Is.

Shloka 12

satyASisho hi bhagavans-tava pAda-padmaM
ASIs-tathAnu-bhajataH purushArtha-mUrte /
apyevam-Arya bhagavan paripAti dInAn
vASreva vatsakam-anugraha-kAtaro'smAn //

Oh Bhagavan! Your lotus feet are the blessed fruit for those who worship You as the Personification of the Ultimate Goal. This is greater than any other blessing. Still like a cow that protects its calf, You do protect us afflicted human souls, because you are intent on showering Your Grace.

Dhruva has so far not referred to his mundane request for which he came to the forest in search of God. This verse takes care of that. Even though it does not specifically make any request, it expresses confidence that the Lord will come to the rescue even unasked, like a cow which protects its own calf. The Lord is *anugraha-kAtaraH,* intent on showering Grace. He is ready to carry you across, the moment you think of Him and even when you do not think of Him. So why worry about those who keep worshipping Him. And in that sense this verse becomes a fitting climax to this famous hymn of praise by Dhruva. It is indeed the pinnacle of praise on the Absolute.

5. Raasa Leela of Krishna

The fervent devotion to Krishna of the celebrated milk-maids (*gopis* or Gopikas) of Brindavan, and particularly of Radha the most prominent of them all, is the best example of *mAdhura-bhakti* (Devotion through Love) for all time. There is a large variety of legends and representations of this *bhakti* in painting and sculpture that spreads through every part of India. The first poetic expression of the Radha-Krishna story was in the *Gita-GovindaM* of Jayadeva (12th century C.E.) The principal character in that poem is Radha, the beloved of Krishna. She spoke no word except prayer. She moved no step except towards Krishna. She saw and heard only Krishna. She spoke only of Him, to Him, for Him, whoever might be in her vicinity. Krishna filled her heart entirely. This magnificent poem is held in high respect and is sung all over India particularly in congregatory singing of Bhajans, the singers often reaching heights of ecstasy. This lyrical extravaganza of Jayadeva is delightful poetry without inhibitions. It is at the very center of religious poetry in the Bhakti tradition, though it may be considered erotic from a Victorian viewpoint. It is venerated as God’s own writing. The singing and dancing associated with this poem are so absorbing not only in its music and rhythm but also in its lyric that describes the love-sport of Radha and Krishna.

What is the origin or source of all this? Is it Jayadeva’s imagination, fancy or invention? No. It all goes back to Shrimad BhA. of Vyasa. In the tenth *skanda* of BhA., there are

five chapters (#s 29 to 33) known as '*RAsa-panchAdhyAyi'*. These five chapters describe the *Raas LeelA* of Krishna with the *gopis* of Brindavan. But wait, before we come to that, we must tune our minds the right way in order to appreciate it all.

So let us go back to the famous story of Krishna's theft of the clothes of the *gopis* while they were bathing in the river. (X - Ch.22). It looks like an immoral story, with a child of six as the central figure. It is spoken of as though he were a full-grown man, insulting the modesty of women. Look at Annie Besant's handling of this story. She writes:

> 'The *gopis* were Rishis, and the Lord Supreme as a babe is teaching them a lesson. But there is more than that. There is a profound occult lesson behind the story. When the Soul is approaching the Supreme Lord at one great stage of initiation, it has to pass through a great ordeal. Stripped of everything on which it has hitherto relied, stripped of everything that is not its inner self, deprived of all external aid, of all external protection, of all external covering, the soul itself, in its own inherent life, must stand naked and alone, with nothing to rely on save the life of the Self within it. If it flinches before the ordeal, if it clings to anything to which it has hitherto looked for help, if in the supreme hour, it cries out for friend or help, or even the *Guru* himself, the soul fails in that ordeal. Naked and alone it must go forth, with absolutely none to aid it save the divinity within itself. And it is that nakedness of the soul as it approaches the supreme goal, that is told of in that story'.

This defence of the conceptual fabric of Hindu spirituality is important for the proper understanding of the *Raas LeelA* of Krishna. In addition, there is another perspective that should never be missed in any discussion of the Raas LeelA. It is the divinity of Krishna himself.

The first description of His birth comes to us from the pen of Vyasa himself in his famous BhA.. It was on that Ashtami day after Shravan Poornima, when the moon was in the asterism Rohini that Krishna was born in that famous prison of Kamsa of Mathura. According to the hair-raising description of that birth in the Shrimad BhA., tenth canto, third chapter, it was in the dense darkness of that fateful night, the Lord appeared – mark the word, appeared, not born – as an unusual child from the womb of Devaki, just like the moon rising on the eastern horizon! Oh, what a sight it was! Continues the BhA.: (X – 3 - 9,10):

tam-adbhutaM bAlakam-ambujekshhaNaM
catur-bhujaM shankha-gadAry-udAyudhaM /
shrIvatsa-lakshhmaM gala-shobhi-kaustubhaM
pItAmbaraM sAndra-payoda-saubhagaM //
mahArha-vaiDUrya-kirITa-kuNDala-
tvishhA parishhvakta-sahasra-kuntalaM /
uddAma-kAnchy-angada-kankaNAdibhiH
virAjamAnaM vasudeva aikshhata //

> meaning, Vasudeva saw that wonderful child with four hands, holding a conch, a mace, a chakra and a lotus; with Srivatsa emblem on His chest; with Kaustubha gem on the neck; with cloth of golden hue; as beautiful as the blue water-filled cloud; with dense hair flowing around amidst the adornments of

> crown and ear-rings radiant with precious gems; and excellently brilliant with bracelets around the hip and arms.

Either you believe in all this or you don't. If you don't believe in all this then *Raas LeelA* of Krishna is also a fiction in the imagination of Vyasa and there is nothing more to discuss except some poetry in the literature. If you believe in all this, then *Raas-LeelA* of Krishna should also be believed to be true. Not only should it be believed to be a true happening but you also get a justification for it. So when doubts arise as to the good or bad of *Raas LeelA*, remember, you have accepted that the birth of Krishna in the above manner is true and that means Krishna is the all-powerful Absolute Divine.

A discussion of *Raas-LeelA* thinking that Krishna was an ordinary person like you and me is a misnomer and a non-issue. We shall not enter the discussion of *Raas-LeelA* that way. We shall only discuss *Raas-LeelA*, with the full conviction that Krishna is the Absolute Transcendental Divinity that is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Lacking this conviction we would have denied ourselves the fundamental eligibility to discuss *Raas LeelA*, and more so the prerequisites to be able to appreciate it.

Now let us come to the actual story part. Remember Krishna was a ten-year old boy at that time. Probably even less. The *gopis* of Brindavan did a month-long *Katyayani vrata*. The purpose: To get Lord Krishna as their husband (*pati*, in Sanskrit). The vrata itself was a very complicated one: Bathing in the Yamuna at daybreak, making an image of the Goddess Parvati with sand on the river bank and worshipping Her with all the formalities. It was at the end of this month-long worship, the incident (as described earlier) of the robbing of their clothes by the Lord happened. The Lord chastised them that they had no business to bathe naked in the river, particularly when they were supposed to be engaged in this *Katyayani vrata*. After telling them that his treatment of them was in punishment of their misbehaviour, he gave them back their clothes; but also promised them that very soon their desire for sporting with the Lord, for which they did the *Katyayani vrata*, would be fulfilled. And in this context, he makes a very important statement which is significant for our understanding of the Ras Leela: (X -22 – 26):

na may-yAveshita-dhiyAM kAmaH kAmAya kalpate /
bharjitA kathitA dhAnA prAyo bIjAya neshhyate //

> Meaning: In the case of whomsoever that has turned their minds towards Me, the desire or lust that thereby arises in them would not result in bad, just as a fried or baked seed would not sprout again.
>
> Recall that all books of Vedanta tell us how a man of wisdom (*Brahma-jnAni*) has no *karma* chasing him, because they are like a fried seed in his case and it will not sprout!

The night of that fulfillment arrived in the autumn following. The requisites for the divine play were all created by Him by His *mAyA*. "*yogamAyAm-upAshritaH*" (resorting to His yoga-*mAyA*) says the text (10-29-1). On that moonlit night, His melodious note on His flute, played in the woodlands adjoing the Yamuna, went all the way to the ears of the *gopi*s and enraptured them. It pleasantly distracted every one and everything from

normal activity and enchanted them to revel in ecstasy. Even shrubs and trees, flowers and leaves, birds and animals 'stood enchanted' with that rapturous divine musical rendering.

No sooner the *gopis* heard the music of His flute, than they were all captivated by the symphony of joy that emanated from it. They came from all sides to the spot where He was playing the flute. Some were milking their cows, some were serving food to their husbands, some were keeping busy with their cosmetics, some were cleaning their houses, -- but all of them dropped their work just where it was and ran towards Krishna. Their husbands, brothers and parents did try to stop them but of no avail. The minds of the *gopis* had been lured away by the music of the flute and by the thought of Lord Krishna and they forgot all about themselves.

Some of the *gopi*s, however, could not manage to get out of their houses, and instead they remained home with eyes closed, meditating upon Him in pure love. For these *gopi*s the intolerable separation from their beloved caused an intense agony that burned away all impious *karma* ("*tIvra-pApa-dhutA-shubhAH*" – X -29-10). By meditating upon Him they realized His embrace, and the ecstasy they then felt exhausted their material piety. Although Lord Krishna is the Supreme Soul, these girls simply thought of Him as their lover and associated with Him in that intimate mood. Thus their karmic bondage was nullified and they abandoned, as it were, their gross material bodies.

At this point, King Parikshit asks a pertinent question to Sage Shuka who is narrating the story: O sage, the *gopi*s knew Krishna only as their lover, not as the Supreme Absolute Truth. So how could these girls, their minds caught up in the waves of worldly love, free themselves from material attachment? And the Rishi replies: Since even Sisupala, who hated Krishna, achieved perfection, then what to speak of the Lord's dear devotees. The Supreme Lord is inexhaustible and immeasurable, and He is untouched by Prakrti because He is its controller. His personal appearance in this world is meant for bestowing the highest benefit on humanity. Persons who constantly direct their lust, anger, fear, protective affection, feeling of impersonal oneness or friendship toward Lord Hari are sure to become absorbed in thought of Him. You should not be so astonished, Oh King, because you are the unique one who had the benefit of seeing His beatific presence even while you were in your mother's womb. (X-29-13 to 16).

Krishna saw them all coming, and when they had gathered, he told them to go back. He waved them back saying that their first duty was in their home with their husbands and relatives. He says: "I know you have ties of attachment for Me. It is but proper. All creatures in the world will find delight in Me ('*prIyante mayi jantavaH'* : X-29-23). But your duty is elsewhere. For a woman from a respectable family, petty adulterous affairs are always condemned. They bar her from heaven, ruin her reputation and bring her difficulty and fear". And He ends this sermon by making a famous declaration (X-29-27) which He himself repeats later:

shravaNAt darshanAt dhyAnAt mayi bhAvo'nukIrtanAt /
na tathA sannikarshheNa pratiyAta tato gRhAn //

> Meaning, Transcendental love for Me arises by the devotional processes of hearing about Me, seeing My Deity form, meditating on Me and faithfully chanting My glories. The same result is not achieved by mere physical proximity. So please go back to your homes.

But the *gopis* don't listen. To his argument that their duty is to their husbands and families, they reply that He is the *pati*, the husband of the entire world and therefore of them all, and so their first duty is to Him. "Not only that, Oh Lord, our minds which were all along with our families and our work have now been totally captivated by You. Our hands and feet are not ours. Our minds are not ours. They are all yours. They refuse to do any work which is not directed at You. So don't throw us back. Deign to accept us as your servants". And they were steadfast in this determination. Seeing their steadfastness, Krishna decided to please them.

iti viklavitaM tAsAM shrutvA yogeshvareshvaraH /
Prahasya sadayaM gopIH AtmArAmo'pyarIramat // X-29-42

> Smiling upon hearing these despondent words from the gopîs, Lord Krishna, the supreme master of all masters of mystic yoga, mercifully satisfied them, although He is Himself Self-satisfied.

He was Himself *AtmARama*, that is One who is fulfilled in Himself, by Himself for Himself. He has nothing to obtain which He does not already have. (cf. *nAnavAptam-avAptavyam*, ... Gita III-22). When He thus moved in intimate terms with the gopis, very soon they thought highly of themselves. They thought they were the greatest women on Earth. And the Lord became aware of their pride and arrogant thought, and intending to bless them with the right kind of spirituality, immediately vanished!

And then begins a long wailing and searching, by the *gopis*. They could not stand this separation from the Lord. They lose their head and become really mad for Him. This is called the experience of '*viraha*', separation. It is said by all exponenets of *bhakti* that the highest form of *bhakti* is the experience of this viraha from the Lord. We think we are all very devoted to God. But do we feel the pangs of separation from Him as the *gopi*s felt?

People say God does not take the offering we give Him ; but do we offer it the way Sabari offered Him? People say that God does not come to our rescue; but do we call Him with that conviction and pangs of anxiety that was characteristic of Draupadi's call? People say that God does not bless us; but do we love Him with that intensity of Radha's love?

"*lok kahte hai bhagwAn khAte nahiM; kyA haM shabarI kI taraH khilAte haim*?
"*lok kahte hai bhagwAn Ate nahiM; kyA haM draupadI kI taraH bulAte haiM*?.
"*lok kahte hai bhagwaan prasAd karte nahiM; kyA ham Radha kI tarah pyAr karte haiM"*?.

To continue our story. The *gopis* keep roaming about in the woods, searching for Him. In the process of this roaming, they identify the footsteps of their Lord and try to follow those footsteps. Lo and behold! They do not find their Lord but they find one more pair of footsteps side by side with the Lord's footsteps! And they look at it carefully. They

recognise it as a woman's footsteps. Their jealousy knows no bounds. How come! One of their own group, has found it possible to be with the Lord and is now enjoying the privilege of His company all alone! What a supreme fortunate circumstance for her! *She must be the most beloved of Krishna among all of them!*

On the other hand that single *gopi* who was with Krishna had an interesting experience. She certainly enjoys the company of the Lord, all alone. But that very enjoyment puffs up her head and she tries to aspire for more of the Lord than the others. Instead of walking up along with the Lord, she suggests to Him that He may carry her on His shoulders, and to her great satisfaction the Lord agrees to do that. He says "Alright, get up on my shoulders" and he poses for her. But when she attempts to climb up on His shoulders, He is no more there – He has vanished! That was the end of her puffed up pride! And the rest of the company joins her now and together they all search for the Lord.

Incidentally, this single gopi is perhaps the Radha of later literature. The name Radha does not occur in the BhAgavatam..

When finally the moon went behind the clouds and there was no more moonlight, they all returned to their starting place and spent their time talking about Krishna. Their minds absorbed in thoughts of Him, they conversed about Him, acted out His pastimes and felt themselves filled with His presence. They no more remembered their homes as they loudly sang the glories of Krishna's transcendental qualities: The *shloka* which says this, namely,

tan-manaskAs-tad-AlApAs-tad-viceshhTAs-tad-AtmikAH /
tad-guNAneva gAyantyaH svAtmA-gArANii sasmaruH // X-30-43

is one of the most famous quotes from Shrimad BhA., because it characterises the supreme prema-*bhakti* of the *gopis*. It is considered to be at the apex of all *bhakti* forms. In fact, it reflects exactly what Krishna himself describes in the *Gita* (V-17):

tad-buddhayas-tad-AtmAnas-tan-nishhTAs-tat-parAyaNAH /
gacchanty-apunar-AvRttiM jnAna-nirdhUta-kalmashhAH // meaning,

Those who have their intellect absorbed in That, whose Self is That, who are steadfast in That, who have That as their supreme Goal-they attain the state of non-returning, their dirt having been removed by Knowledge.

This kind of total absorption in God is the ultimate in Bhakti. That is why the *gopis* are cited as the supreme example of self-effacing *bhakti*. There have been several types of devotees all over time and all over the world. But the Lord values only such selfless *bhakti*. The *bhakti* of the *gopi*s is unique in all of history, because, they did not achieve that kind of superlative approbation from the Lord by any of the usual means of spiritual living, namely, charity, ritual sacrifice, ritualistic vrata, religious discipline, penance, philosophical speculation, or yogic practice. None of these they had. None of these can give that kind of union with the Lord as the constant mental association with Him that

they did have. (*Na.*: 94-10) (See the Section on Selections from *Na.* in the Chapter on 'Speak to God through Prayers').

In fact this underscores the importance of personal involvement with the Lord in intimate terms, from the heart of hearts. All the formalities of our religious observances pale into insignificance before such a personal relationship with God. Whatever we may do, we must strive to see that this innate feeling of love for the Lord becomes the undercurrent. This is the only thing He asks from us. More than intellectual understanding of the various nuances of scriptures and philosophy, what He expects from us is this self-negating love for Him and all that stands for Him, namely, the universe.

One may recall here *Gita* IX – 34:

manmanA bhava madbhakto madyAjI mAM namaskuru /
mAmevaiShyasi yuktvaivaM AtmAnaM mat-parAyaNaH //

meaning, Saturate your mind with me; be devoted to me; work for me; bow down to me; having thus united your whole self with me, taking me as the supreme Goal, you shall come unto me.

This self-negating love has been defined by Narada in his *bhakti*-sutra, as follows (Sutra 54):

guNa-rahitaM kAmanA-rahitaM pratikShaaNa-vardhamAnaM avicchinnaM
sUkShma-taram anubhava-rUpaM.

Meaning, (This pure love is) without attributes, without the poison of desire, every moment increasing, unbroken, subtlest, and of the nature of sheer immediate experience.

In fact almost every exponent of *bhakti* says the same thing.

Let us come back to the story. The *gopis*, having lost track of Krishna in the physical world, spend their time now singing about Him in all ecstasy. This singing as told in 18 delightful verses of Shrimad BhA. is called "*gopikA-gItaM*". It is chapter 31 of Skanda 10. In traditional India these 18 verses are usually taught to young girls for them to obtain the fullest grace of God, particularly with respect to their marriage. Jayadeva's *Gita* Govindam derives inspiration from this. Let us see just three *shloka*s out of the 18. In the practical performace of the dance of *gopi*kA-gItaM it is common to use the word '*kRshhNa*' repeatedly to keep the beat:

jayati te'dhikaM (kRshhNa) janmanA vrajaH
shrayata indirA (kRshhNa) shashvad-atra hi /
dayita dRshyatAM (kRshhNa) dikshhu tAvakAH
tvayi dhRtAsavaH (kRshhNa) tvAM vicinvate // (X-31-1)

O beloved, Your birth in the land of Vraja has made it exceedingly glorious, and thus Indirâ, the goddess of fortune, always resides here. It is only for Your sake

that we, Your devoted servants, maintain our lives. We have been searching everywhere for You, so please show Yourself to us.

na khalu gopikA (kRshhNa) nandano bhavAn
akhila-dehinAM (kRshhNa) antar-Atma-dRk /
vikhanasArthito (kRshhNa) vishva-guptaye
sakha udeyivAn (kRshhNa) sAtvatAm kule // (X-31-4)

You are not actually the son of the gopî Yas'odâ, O friend, but rather the indwelling witness in the hearts of all embodied souls. Because Lord Brahmâ prayed for You to come and protect the universe, You have now appeared in the Sâtvata dynasty.

tava kathAmRtaM (kRshhNa) tapta-jIvanaM
kavibhir-IDitaM (kRshhNa) kalmashhApahaM /
shravaNa-mangaLaM (kRshhNa) shrImad-AtataM
bhuvi gRNanti te (kRshhNa) bhuridA janAH // (X-31-9)

The nectar of Your words and the descriptions of Your activities are the life and soul of those suffering in this material world. These narrations, transmitted by learned sages, eradicate one's sinful reactions and bestow good fortune upon whoever hears them. They are filled with spiritual power. Certainly those who spread the message of Godhead must have been munificent.

At the end of it all, Krishna reappears. The *gopis* are agog with excitement. It was as if their lives returned to them (*"tanvaH prANaM iva AgataM" X-32-3*). All the varieties of human emotions that can arise at such an event are described here without inhibitions. It is a no-holds-barred description. At the end of it all, Krishna, whose seat is in the hearts of great yogis, now sits encircled by these *gopi*s on an elevated sand dune on the bank of Kalindi, lit up splendidly by the abundant autumnal moonlight and starts talking with them in very intimate terms. It is said that each *gopi* had the feet of the Lord on her lap.

Mark this statement. Here starts the full sway of the mAyA of the Lord. There were at least a hundred gopis. In fact the numbers that are mentioned in the BhA. will make our heads reel. Anyway there were several of them. If each one had the feet of the Lord on her lap, and if each one was having the feeling that the Lord was talking to herself with His feet on her lap, the Lord must have replicated himself as many times as there were gopis there. This point is mentioned when the actual Raas Leela starts, but even here the magic of the mAyA has started!

Now Krishna starts talking. In fact they have raised an important question for Him to answer. Some people reciprocate the affection only of those who are affectionate toward them, while others show affection even to those who are indifferent or inimical. And yet others will not show affection toward anyone. Dear Krishna, please properly explain this matter to us.(X-32-16), say the *gopis*. And He explains very patiently, in *shloka*s 17 to 22:

So-called friends who show affection for each other only to benefit themselves are actually selfish. They have no true friendship, nor are they following the true principles of religion. Indeed, if they did not

> expect benefit for themselves, they would not reciprocate. Some people are genuinely merciful or, like parents, naturally affectionate. Such persons, who devotedly serve even those who fail to reciprocate with them, are following the true, faultless path of religion, and they are true well-wishers. Some people, being spiritually self-satisfied, do not reciprocate others' affection because they want to avoid entanglement in mundane dealings. Other persons do not reciprocate simply out of envy or arrogance. And still others fail to reciprocate because they are materially satisfied and thus uninterested in new material opportunities. I do understand that simply for My sake you had rejected the authority of worldly opinion, of the Vedas and of your relatives. But I acted as I did only to increase your attachment to Me. Even when I removed Myself from your sight by suddenly disappearing, I never stopped loving you. Therefore, My beloved gopîs, please do not harbor any bad feelings toward Me, your beloved. And He winds up by saying:
>
> I will not be able to repay My debt for your spotless service, even within a lifetime of Brahmâ. Your connection with Me is beyond reproach. You have worshiped Me, cutting off all domestic ties, which are difficult to break. Therefore please let your own glorious deeds be your compensation. (X -32-32):
>
> *na pâraye 'ham niravadya-samyujâm*
> *sva-sâdhu-krityam vibudhâyushâpi vah/*
> *yA mA'bhajan durjara-geha-shRngkaLAH*
> *samvRshcya tadvaH pratiyAtu sAdhunA//*

This passage speaks volumes about the love of the *gopi*s towards Krishna and how he acknowledged it. It is the charter that gives the universally glorified sanctity to the spotless Krishna-Bhakti of the *gopis*. Great devotees are not great because they call themselves so (if at all), but because the Lord calls them great!

And now begins the Raas LeelA, the most enchanting of all His leelAs. They all linked their arms together and thought they were encircling Him. But actually between each pair of *gopi*s there was a Krishna. Each Gopi felt the left hand of Krishna on her right shoulder and the right hand of Krishna on her left shoulder. She was thinking therefore that Krishna was dancing in front of her, facing her with His hands on her shoulders. But what was happening was that she had one Krishna on her left and another Krishna on her right! The yogeshvara that Krishna was, he had enveloped the entire assembly of *gopis* in His *mAyA* and their minds were not their own now. They thought whatever He wanted them to think! But they all enjoyed an eternal bliss in the play of Raas LeelA! There were actually three such plays. One in water ('*jala-kRIDA*), one in the woods ('*vana-kRIDA'*) and one on open ground ('*sthala-kRIDA'*). The night itself got extended because the elements had all halted. Heaven and Nature watched this magnificent divine romantic dance of the several Krishnas with the several *gopis*. And the beauty of it all was, that, back home, in every house of the *gopi*s, the *gopi*'s husband did not miss his wife; as far as he knew she was there with him!. The whole world was in trance, as it were! That was the greatness of the Raas dance!

Well, let us come down to terra firma. When this whole thing had been narrated by Shuka, King Parikshit asks the most relevant question: "Well, let me take it that Krishna had nothing to achieve, because He is always self-fulfilled. But what he did does not appear to be ethical, from any worldly angle. Why, then, did he do that? Should He not set the right example?" (X-33 – 27 to 29).

Note that Parikshit's question is not the question we ourselves raised at the beginning of this article. We said that we shall not be discussing this issue if it had the assumption that Krishna was an ordinary human being. King Parikshit postulates his acceptance of the divinity of Krishna. But his question is: Why does the Lord set a bad example for mankind?

And Shuka answers: (X – 33 -30 to 38): The status of *ISvara* is not harmed by any apparently audacious transgression of morality we may see in Him, for He is just like fire, that devours everything fed into it and remains unpolluted. We ordinary people should never imitate the behavior of such ruling personalities, even mentally. If out of foolishness an ordinary person does imitate such behaviour, he will simply destroy himself, just as a person who is not Rudra would destroy himself if he tried to drink an ocean of poison. It is the words of *ISvara* which we should follow, not those of His actions which are inconsistent with those words.

When these great persons who are free from false ego act piously in this world, they have no selfish motives to fulfill, and even when they act in apparent contradiction to the laws of piety, they are not subject to sinful reactions. How, then, could the Lord of all created beings have any connection with the piety and impiety that affect His subject creatures?

Material activities never entangle even the devotees of the Supreme Lord, who are fully satisfied by serving the dust of His lotus feet. Nor do material activities entangle those intelligent sages who have freed themselves from the bondage of all fruitive reactions by the fact that they have disassociated themselves with their body, mind intellect. Then, how could there be any question of bondage for the Lord Himself, who assumes His transcendental forms according to His own sweet will?

The Actionlessness of the Lord is well-known from his statements in the *Gita*:

> By Me was created the four *varNas*, in accordance with their *GuNas* and *karma*. Know Me as its doer and know Me also as the imperishable non-doer. (*Gita* IV-13) Those works do not bind Me. I sit, indifferent as it were, unattached to those actions. (*Gita* IX – 9)

In fact Actionlessness is a central concept in the understanding of the actions of a man of wisdom (*Brahma-jnAni*). The *nAhaM kartA* (I-am-not-the-doer) attitude is the core of all of Krishna's advice to Arjuna.

He who lives as the *sAkshi* (overseeing witness) within the gopîs and their husbands, and indeed within all embodied living beings, assumes forms in this world to enjoy transcendental pastimes. When the Lord assumes a humanlike body to show mercy to His devotees, He engages in such pastimes as will attract those who hear about them to

become dedicated to Him. For us, devotees of Krishna, we are told by Shuka himself, that those who listen to these stories of this great Raas LeelA of Krishna, will not only become great devotees of the Lord, but would be able to conquer the ingrained lust in the human psyche!

Raadhe Krishna! It is said that Raadha was given a promise by the Lord that for all time to come, Her name (Radha's) would be taken first before His own (Krishna's) is taken!! Raadhe Krishna!!!

6. Shruti Gita

The vedas are collectively called *Shruti* in Sanskrit; for they were only heard, revealed or rediscovered by yogic powers, not remembered as a written work. The piece *Shruti-Gita* occurs in the 87th chapter of the tenth book of Srimad-BhA.. King Parikshit asks a legitimate question: *How at all do the vedas talk of the attributeless Brahman while their main concern throughout is the detailed description of the Gods with their attributes, qualities, deeds and of the sacrifices which link the humans with the divines?* In answer to this, sage Shuka narrates a story.

It appears once Narada went to the sage Narayana in *badarikASrama*, and asked the same question. In answer to it Narayana quoted what he said was S*Ananda*na's answer to the same question in a celestial seminar (referred to as *brahma-satram*, that is, the *yajna* performed to understand the *Brahman*) in the world of *jano-loka*, when Narada was away in another portion of the world, called *Shveta-dvIpa*. According to S*Ananda*na, the vedas sang the praise of the Lord in his *nirguNa* (=attributeless) state at the beginning of creation, even before the creator Brahma had been created. It was actually done by the Shruti to wake up the Lord from His *yoga-nidrA* (Cosmic Sleep) at the beginning of the *kalpa*. The 28 verses (Nos.14 to 41 of chapter 87 of Book X) that pour forth in this connection from the *Shruti* form a gold mine of vedantic hymns, which are, in the content of their meaning as well as in the language of their expression, as profound and authentic as would befit the prestigious stature of the very vedas that constitute the ultimate source for everything in Hinduism, its philosophy and metaphysics. Incidentally the verses are in a very rare metre, called *narkuTaka* metre.

The whole passage shows an all-embracing humility, which recalls to one's mind the reference to *Shruti* in *lalitA-sahasra-nAma* through the name:

Shruti-sImanta-sindUrI-kRta-pAdAbja-dhUlikA.

The word *Shruti* is feminine in Sanskrit. The *Shruti* personified as women are said to bow down at the feet of the divine Mother. This prostration is what is referred to here. When *Shruti* falls at the feet of the Mother of the universe, her head naturally touches the divine feet of the Mother. The dust of the divine feet is crimson in colour since the divine feet are always painted that way. The crimson dust sticks to the head of Lady *Shruti* exactly at the parting of the front hair. Thus arises the name: The Divinity the dust of whose lotus feet has crimson-coloured the parting of the hair on the head of *Shruti*. More importantly,

the dust of the divine feet on the head of *Shruti* is an indication that even though *Shruti* may be of vast content and knowledge, Her knowledge of the divine Mother could only be a speck! This does not mean, however, that our reading of the vedas could be of no use in our spiritual path; without the vedas and the grand pronouncements in the vedas we have no way of ever knowing *'That Thou Art'*! A quick, though inadequate, summary of 15 of the 28 verses of the *Shruti-Gita* with their characteristic use of Upanishadic concepts and expressions, is attempted below. I consider these fifteen most difficult and dense in content. The purport of each verse that we select is given first in a rather condensed form and then we follow it up with an explanation, meanings of difficult word-combinations and a commentary. We follow, as far as possible, the *vyAkhyAna* by the commentastor, *nIlakanTha*.

***Shruti-Gita* – 1 (X - 87 – 14)**:

jaya jaya jahy-ajAM ajita dosha-gRbhIta-guNAM
tvam-asi yad-AtmanA samavaruddha-samasta-bhagaH /
aga-jagad-okasAM akhila-Sakty-avabodhaka te
kvacid-ajayA-'tmanAca carato'nucaren-nigamaH //

Oh Unconquered Lord, You are the One endowed with all the glories. Oh awakener of all the powers in the souls! You are the only One who can overpower the beginningless *mAyA*, your own *Shakti*, which keeps all beings (with mobile or immobile bodies) under its spell and which has taken on itself the three *guNas* along with their nature (of throwing souls into bondage). At the beginning of Creation, you with your *mAyA* as well as all by yourself you sport; so do we, the vedas, speak of You.

dosha-gRbhIta-guNAM - (Her) who has taken over the characteristic (three) guNas for their 'evil purpose' .

aga-jagad-okasAM - : *aga*, unmoving; *jagat*, moving; *okasAM*, (in the case of) embodied souls.

It is significant to note that, at the very beginning of creation, even before creation starts, the vedas have already recognized Him as the progenitor of *mAyA*. It is the beginningless Ignorance (*anAdy-avidyA*) that through the three *guNas* obscures the blissful state of the *jIva* and makes the beings unaware of their eternal state. You can do it because, we, the vedas say, know that you can be in both the states, the state of being in Your own Self and also the state of being in unison with Her. Commentator *nIlakaNTha* says this verse has encapsuled the entire store of scriptural knowledge.

***Shruti-Gita* – 2 (X - 87 – 15)**:

bRhad-upalabdam-etad-avayanty-avaSeshatayA
yata udayAstamayau vikRter-mRd-ivA-vikRtAt /
ata Rshayo dadhus-tvayi mano-vacanA-caritaM
katham-ayathA bhavanti bhuvi datta-padAni nRNAM //

The wise recognize this Universe to be *Brahman*, because it is *Brahman* that is the residual. It is from and into *Brahman* that the universe emanates and

dissolves - just as from earth earthenware rise and fall. Therefore when we glorify any God by words contemplated by the mind, and names spoken by the tongue the praise has to go only to you. Placing one's foot on a mountain does not mean that one is keeping his feet not on Earth.

etat upalabdhaM bRhat :- This visible universe is *Brahman*
mano-vacanA-caritaM :- executed by the mind and the speech.
ayathA:- not (placed) on Earth.
vacana-AcaritaM (the essence of Vedanta)
tvayi (is in you)
ataH (therefore) *RshayaH* (the sages)
mano dadhuH (fixed their mind) (*tvayi* = in your Ultimate Form).

It is *Brahman* that is the residual after everything is gone. So the Cause is to be known, not the effect. Knowing the cause, we know everything that has to be known. Before manifestation, and after dissolution, whatever is existent is the Absolute Truth. The vedas in their text talk of different Gods, but these are only names and forms. All of them ultimately go only to the Permanent Absolute.

The beautiful analogy of the step on the mountain being the same as a step on Earth, is cited here. This analogy, to my limited knowledge, appears to be available nowhere else in the vast scriptural literature of Hinduism. That shows the originality of the vedas; they don't repeat what everybody else says; they have their own original way of expression! This verse by itself is enough to quell the doubting critic of the vedas, in connection with the mention, in the vedas, of the various gods, *agni, varuna, vayu, soma, surya, indra,* etc. The criticism is usually of the following kind. Throughout the vedic literature one finds that sometimes it is *varuNa*, the Divinity representing Water, sometimes it is *agni,* the fire-God and some other times it is *indra* the Lord of the divines that are eulogised with superlatives. For instance, cf.

agnir-mUrdhA divaH /Fire-God is the King of the Divine World. *sUrya AtmA jagatas-tasthushaSca* /The Sun-God is the soul of the mobile as well as the immobile

indro yAto'vasitasya rAjA /Indra is the King of the mobile and the immobile. *Apo vA idam sarvaM* /Water is this Universe.

The earliest western readers who came into contact with this literature propounded the thought process that during the vedic times it was all pantheism or polytheism and only later, almost at the end of the first millenium B.C.E. that the One God idea came up. This thought process may be a welcome line of research for occidental thinking. But if you look at the superlatives being used in the same manner and language for each vedic deity one cannot but conclude that the last words are those passages where each such deity is considered as only one expression of the many-faceted supreme Almighty. And here is the verse in the *Shruti Gita* which should put an end to such wild speculations of the uninformed reader.

***Shruti-Gita* – 3 (X - 87 – 17)**:

dRtaya iva Svasanty-asubRto yadi te'nuvidhA
mahad-aham-Adayo'NDam-asRjan-yad-anugrahataH /
purusha-vidho'nvayo'tra caramo'nnamayAdishu yaH
sad'asataH paraM tvam-atha yad-esh-vavaSesham-RtaM//

People live (justify their existence) only if they follow your commandments or else they simply breathe like bellows. You are That by Whose Grace *mahat-tattva* and *aham-kAra* have brought into being this egg-like universe; it is you who animate the (five) sheaths (*koSas*) assuming the shape of those sheaths in sequence and permeating them although You are the Ultimate substance underlying everything, beyond the gross as well as the subtle, that which remains as the Reality.

anuvidhAH:- followers, devotees.
eshu (bAdhyamAneshu api) avaSeshaM :- that remains even after these physical, etc. sheaths have disappeared.
anvayaM: *anu* + *ayaM* : according to this one.; loosely, 'sequence'.

Reader, be ready now for something very profound. Recall that the vedas are now talking (to you) in person. The vedas contain the most profound ideas in themselves. So when pouring out the praise on the Absolute, they pull out from their armoury 'without mercy'! This verse pulls out a beautiful analysis from T.U., known as the *panca-koSa* analysis.

The Upanishad mentions the physical sheath first. And then it says there is a vital sheath within. Within that again there is the mental sheath; again, the intellectual sheath within; and finally within that, the sheath of bliss. All these five sheaths are permeated by *Brahman*. But according to the Upanishad the reality is not so simple as we have presented it just now. In its characteristic stately style the Upanishadic presentation goes as follows.

The *Brahman* which is permeated in everything can be 'visualised' in the *purusha*, namely our own person. First we have the physical body. We seem to understand it well. This physical body is made up of the food that we consume. What we see as this body is the corporeal self (*anna-maya koSa*). Within this corporeal self there is a subtler self called the vital self (*prANa-maya koSa*). It (the vital self) fills the corporeal self like heat filling a metal piece put in the fire. So the vital self (or sheath, *koSa*) permeates the corporeal self totally. The upanishad uses the word '*purusha*' for each of these 'selves'. So the vital *purusha* fills up the corporeal *purusha*. Within the vital '*purusha*' there is the *manomaya purusha* (the mental self). Within the latter one there is the *vijnAna-maya purusha* (the intellectual self). And within the *vijnAnana-maya* there is the *Ananda-maya purusha* (the blissful self). The word 'within' here in each case is an understatement, a failure of words. In each case the succeeding sheath fills up the preceding one. Each '*purusha*' follows the preceding one, is more subtle than the preceding one, and fills up the preceding one. This subtle sequencing is referred to by the terminology '*anvayaM purusha-vidhaH*' repeatedly by the Upanishad. In each case the particular *purusha* is imagined to be a bird with wings, head, tail, etc. We shall not get into these details here.

In a 'pseudo-scientific' way we may understand the whole sequencing as follows. In every cell of the body it is the life-force that is functioning. This life-force in every cell sends responses to the mind from every sensation it receives. So the mind is permeating the life-force in every cell. But there is an agent of the mind, who cognizes that it is 'I' and that it is the owner of all these sensations and responses. That is the *vijnAna-maya* self. He is the agent and experiencer. He is proximate, in a metaphorical sense, to the *Atman*, the pure Spirit within. But it is not itself the pure Spirit. It has the notion of agency. Stripped of this notion of agency it is only the experiencer of joy. That is the bliss-self (the *Ananda-maya koSa*). Even this is not the *Atman*. The Upanishad says that the *Atman* is the support, base, substratum of even this *Ananda-maya-koSa*.

Coming back to our verse no.3 of *Shruti-Gita*, we notice that the same words '*purusha-vidhaH anvayaH*' are used as in the Upanishad. Why not? It is the Upanishads (i.e., the vedas) that are speaking! So the vedas are saying here that You, the Absolute, who are the final (*carama*) support for the sheaths of Self, starting from the physical self, going all the way upto the bliss-self, each succeeding one having the same extent of permeation as the preceding one -- as described in the *panca-koSa* analysis.

***Shruti-Gita* – 4 (X - 87 – 18)**:

udaram-upAsate ya Rshi-vartmasu kUrpa-dRSaH
parisara-paddhatiM hRdayam-AruNayo daharaM /
tata udagAd-ananta tava dhAma SiraH paramaM
punar-iha yat-sametya na patanti kRtAnta-mukhe //

Out of the many paths chalked out by the Seers, men of gross vision contemplate on (the spiritual center) in the abdomen, while the sons of the sage Aruna contemplate on the cavity of the heart, the organ from which the veins and arteries branch out. Thence proceeds upwards , O infinite Lord, the artery leading to the head (in fact, to You). Reaching this path men do not fall again into the jaws of Death here.

kUrpa-dRSaH : Those whose vision is clouded by the quality of rajas and therefore cannot see the subtleties of the Spirit *kUrpa* also means 'subtle' . If we take this meaning then *kUrpa-dRSaH* will mean those who have a subtle vision; they start with meditation on the *maNipUraka* located on the *sushumna-nADi* opposite the navel and rise up.

parisara-paddhatim : that which is the royal route for the *nADis* which are spread in all quarters.

The meditation referred to is the standard path of *rAja-yoga* which makes the ***kundalinI*** rise through the six *cakras* and finally reach the *sahasrAra cakra* in the head. It is the meditation on the Absolute attributeless *Brahman*.

***Shruti-Gita* – 5 (X - 87 – 19)**:

sva-kRta-vicitra-yonishu viSanniva hetutayA
taratamataS-cakAs-syanalavat-sva-kRtAnukRtiH /

atha vitathAs-vamUsh-vavitatham tava dhAma samam
viraja-dhiyo'nvayanty-abhivipaNyava ekarasam //

Entering as it were the diverse types of living organisms evolved by yourself, though (as a matter of fact) You already existed in them as their (material) cause, and assuming those forms, You shine (through them) as high or low like fire. Therefore, men of unclouded judgment, who do not expect any (worldly or other-worldly) reward of their actions, recognize your true nature as the one immutable, undifferentiated and uniform substance in those unreal forms.

taratamataH : in the small and in the great; almost; both in the high and in the low.

abhivipaNyavaH : those who have divested themselves of all attachment, either here or hereafter, either in this world or in the other worlds.

analavat cakAsi : Fire though undifferentiated in itself assumes diverse shapes accprding to the shape of the logs of firewood.

As a mathematician, this author knows, and all scientists would know it, how tightly, at the same time without loss of precision, one has to word a paper for publication in the research journals. Particularly for certain prestigious journals in mathematics, there cannot be a single unnecessary word, or extra explanation that does not add to the content. Here the Shruti *Gita* has been worded in this tight fashion. In all the 28 verses of the Shruti gIta there is not a single unnecessary word. And here is an example of the precision with which the vedas speak. We refer to the word '*iva*' (meaning, as it were) in the verse . Even the upanishad only says 'Having created (the universe), He entered it'. The '*iva*' is emphasized as the intended meaning, only through the commentaries.

***Shruti-Gita* – 6 (X - 87 – 20)**:

sva-kRta-puresh-vamIsh-vabahir-antara-samvaraNam
tava purusham vadanty-akhila-Shakti-dhRto'mSa-kRtam /
iti nRgatim vivicya kavayo nigamAvapanam
bhavata-upAsate'nghrim-abhavam bhuvi viSvasitAH //

The Vedas speak of the purusha dwelling in these bodies shaped by itself, though, as a matter of fact, it is not limited by anything which is of the nature of cause and effect as a part, made as it were out of you, the wielder of all potencies. Having thus determined the nature of the *Purusha*, the wise on this earth, full of faith, adore your feet at which acts enjoined by the vedas are offered and which put an end to rebirth.

sva-kRta-pureshu : In the dwellings (bodies) brought on by one's own past *karma*.

a-bahir-antara-samvaraNam : bahih = external, antaH = internal; Here these words refer to the external 'effect' and internal 'cause'. The 'a' prefix is for negation. So the composite word means: that which is not limited or covered by anything of the nature of cause and effect.

***Shruti-Gita* – 7 (X - 87 – 24)**:

ka iha nu veda batAvara janma-layo'grasaram
yata udagAd-Rshir-yam-anu devagaNA ubhaye /
tarhi na san-nacAsad-ubhayam na ca kAla-javah
kimapi na tatra SAstram-avakRshya SayIta yadA //

Alas! What individual of posterior birth and death can possibly

know You, who are anterior to all and from whom came forth Brahma, after whom appeared the two classes of Gods. When, you repose after having withdrawn everything, there exist at that time neither the gross phenomena nor the subtle nor the product of both nor the flux of time nor anything else nor the scriptural texts.

na sanna cAsat : (*na sat na ca asat*) Here *sat* stands for the concrete (gross) space - elemental fundamental. *asat* stands for the subtle *mahat* principle from which the space element evolved.

Recall the passage from the Rgveda, quoted later in the yajurveda also:

ko addhA v eda ka iha pravocat /kuta AjAtA kuta iyam visRshTih /
arvAgdevA asya visarjane na /athA ko veda yata A babhUva //

Who knows that absolute really directly? Who will be able to expound it? Where would these creations have come from (but from Him)? Deities lower than that Absolute would not know about Creation. Therefore, the first origin of this Creation, Creator Brahma probably knows. Maybe not.

arvAg : lower level ; *kaH* : BrahmA; *na* : not capable.

'The bottomline of this *shloka* is to say that Creation or the Absolute cannot be established by logic' -- Commentator NilakanTha. How can anyone know the subtle truth of the Absolute unless instructed by the Divinity Itself?

***Shruti-Gita* – 8 (X - 87 – 26)**

sadiva manas-trivRt-tvayi vibhAty-asad-AmanujAt
sad-abihmRSanty-aSesham-idam-AtmatayA"tma-vidah /
na hi vikRtim tyajanti kanakasya tadAtmatayA
sva-kRtam-anupravishTam-idam-AtmatayA-vasitam //

All this universe consisting of the three guNas which is a projection of the mind, including the *jIva*, though unreal, appears as real being superimposed on you. The knowers of the Self recognize this entire universe to be real because of its being a projection of their very Self. Just as those in quest of gold do not reject its modification (in the form of ornaments) so is this universe concluded to be their very self inasmuch as it is evolved and interpenetrated by the *Atman*.

Nobody rejects the goldness of the ornament because it is an ornament and not just gold. The universe as well as the *JIva* derive existential value because of the Absolute which is

their substratum. The knowers of Self therefore recognise all this as existing because all form an expression of the Absolute Reality.

***Shruti-Gita* – 9 (X - 87 – 31)**:

na ghaTata udbhavah prakRti-purushayor-ajayoh
ubhaya-yujA bhavanty-asubRto jala-budbudhavat /
tvayi ta ime tato vividha-nAma-guNaih parame
sarita ivArNave madhuni lilyur-aSesha-rasAh //

There is no such thing as the birth of *prakRti* or of *purusha*. Both of them are (declared to be) beginningless. Living beings come into existence when the two come to be united, just bubbles appear on water through the interaction of air and water. They get merged in You the final cause, just as rivers disappear into the sea or as nectars of flowers get dissolved into honey.

ubhaya-yujA : the two things that are apparently united here are the Self and non-Self. In fact, one is mistaken for the other. There is a mutual superimposition here of both into a complex unit in which their separateness cannot be understood or experienced.

Does *prakRti* become the individual soul? No. Because the latter is not inert. Does *purusha* become the soul? No. Because the former is immutable (*nirvikAri*) . A bubble does not arise in the ocean by just water alone nor by just air alone. *prakRti* and *purusha* are both beginningless, they have no origin or birth. But by the adjunct of Ignorance, they appear as the individual soul. There is no change of form in reality. It is not the change of *svarUpa* (inherent phase, aspect or conformation). The *svarUpa-lakshaNa* (Definition as it is) of the Ultimate is always the same. So the origination of the soul is because of the *upAdhi* (adjunct) and the dissolution is also along with the adjunct. When all the Jivas dissolve in the Absolute, either in deep sleep or in liberation, then all their separateness disappears, with this difference that in sleep the mergence is still in combination with the adjuncts in a subtle form as of flower nectars of various kinds in honey, while in liberation it is absolute mergence as of river water in the ocean.

***Shruti-Gita* – 10 (X - 87 – 33)**:

vijita-hRshIka-vAyubhir-adAnta-manas-turagam
ya iha yatanti yantum-atilolam-upAya-khidaH /
vyasana-SatAnvitAs-samavahAya guroScaraNam
vaNija ivAja santi akRta-karNa-dharA jaladhau //

They who endeavour to break the most restless horse of their mind - unsubdued by those who have controlled their senses and breath - neglecting the feet of their preceptor, and taking pains over other devices, remain beset with a hundred and one calamities in this world like merchants that have not secured a pilot in the sea, O birthless Lord.

***Shruti-Gita* – 11 (X - 87 – 36)**:

sata idam-uthitam sad-iti cenna nu tarka-hatam
vyabhicarati kva ca kva ca mRshA na tathobhayayuk /
vyavahRtaye vikalpa ishito'ndha-paramparayA
bhramayati bhAratI ta uru-vRttibhir-ukta-jaDAn //

That this universe is real because it has evolved from Reality, will not hold logical analysis. When the effect of a cause shows up, sometimes it varies from the cause very much, sometimes the effect is false while the cause is relatively more real. The universe is in fact a product of both *Brahman* and *avidyA*; thereby also it is not real. Just for the sake of phenomenal functioning the illusory reality of the universe is accepted. The Vedic texts declaring the effect of rituals etc. are only traditional ways of deluding dullwitted persons into faith. They are valid only till the Illumination of the absolute sets in.

vyavhRtaye : for carrying on worldly transactions.

This verse goes through all the objections which other schools of thought may raise for establishing the permanence or reality of the universe and the worldly rules regulations and rituals and their other-worldly meritorious effects .

7. A Devotee calls the Tune

Great is the world.
Greater is *BrahmA* whose creation it is.
BrahmA was born from the navel of *VishNu.*
*VishNu slee*ps on the waves of the ocean.
The ocean was gobbled up as a handful by *agastya.*
agastya was born in just a pot.
The pot itself is only a little earth.
The earth is held up by one head of the Snake-Lord.
The Snake itself is just a ring of the little finger of the Goddess.
The Goddess is only one half of the Lord.
The Lord resides in the Devotee's mind.
Devotee's greatness is beyond words !

--- A POPULAR VERSE FROM AVVAI, THE GREAT TAMIL POETESS AND MOTHER-WIT

This is the story of the devotee who was greater than the God of his devotion. King Ambarisha, was the great grandson of Vaivasvata-Manu, the 7th Lord of the Earth in this

cosmic Day of Brahma . Neither his kingship nor the wealth that goes with it could enchant him away from his constant and intense devotion for the Lord, Lord Narayana. The Lord was so pleased with him that He gave him His own miraculous *sudarSana - cakra* (=Disc) that can overcome any kind of attack.

Ambarisha, once performed a year-long *dvAdaSi-vrata*. This enjoined on him a complete fast on every *ekAdaSi* day (the 11th day of the lunar fortnight) and which has to be broken exactly on the next day (*dvAdaSi* = the 12th day) at a specific time. On one such occasion, on the morning of *dvAdaSi* day, the sage Durvasa, (known for his short temper and fierce anger) came as guest, along with his disciples, at the doors of king Ambarisha. The latter was about to break his fast, but seeing the esteemed guest, he was ready to play host for him but Durvasa wanted time to go to the river, have his bath and perform his morning rituals before he partook of Ambarisha's hospitality. Ambarisha agreed to wait, hoping that Durvasa would respect his Vrata and come back before the time of his breaking the fast. The fast was to be broken not later than a specific time. But he waited and waited; Durvasa did not turn up before the specific time. When it was no more possible to wait, the king's advisors, both secular and religious, advised him to sip a little water in the formal religious way (in the form of an Acamanam) by chanting the names of God and that, they said, would be equivalent to breaking one's fast. This would satisfy the rules of the Vrata as well as the protocol, by which, he would not have eaten before his notable guest.

But Durvasa, when he appeared, would not agree. He felt the protocol broken and he had been insulted; in no time he created a demon from one of his hairs to attack and kill the King. The King did'nt move an inch but the Lord's Disc which was protecting him, not only burnt the demon by its fiery power, but now in its turn, attacked Durvasa himself. The sage in sheer fright, ran for his life ! The Disc of the Lord pursued Durvasa wherever he went, through even the three worlds. Finally he went to the Creator *BrahmA*. The Creator pleaded inability to defend him against the Disc. Durvasa then went to Lord *Siva*. The latter said; The whole world is engulfed in *VishNu-mAyA*. None of us, can help you in this matter. You may try going to Lord *VishNu* Himself. So Durvasa came to Lord *VishNu*'s abode and fell at His feet. Lo and Behold! *VishNu* also is helpless!. Look what He says to Ambarisha:

> " My dear Durvasa, can you not see that I am also just as helpless as *BrahmA* or *Siva*? Evidently you do not know about me. I am not a free person. I may be able to do anything I like. But first and foremost, I belong to my devotees. All that is mine belongs to them. They have renounced everything and have chosen me as their sole companion. They have abandoned everything for my sake: wife, home, child, and kinsmen: their very lives. They have no thought of this world or the next. Heaven holds no charm for them. All they want is my grace. In return I have sworn that I will never abandon them. The foremost thought in my mind is the *bhakti* they have for me. They have conquered me with their love and I am powerless against their love. I have no will of my own. Their sorrow is my sorrow and their happiness is mine. I am famed by the name "*Bhakta-*

> *parAdhIna*" (subservient to the devotees). I am not as fond of myself or even my *Devi Lakshmi* as I am of my devotees. When such is the case, how can I treat them casually? Any insult offered to my devotee is considered as an insult to me. Just as good women make slaves of their husbands by the extreme love they have for them, even so my devotees have made me their slave" (from Kamala Subramanian's rendering of the *bhAgavatam*; 9 – 4 – 63 to 69).

The Lord says in so many words: *Devotees are my heart. I am the heart of (my) devotees. They are not aware of anything other than me; and I also do not know, even an iota, of anything other than them.*

sAdhavo hRdayam mahyam sAdhUnAm hRdayam tvaham/
mad-anyat te na jAnanti nAham tebhyo manAg-api//

The Lord sorts out the problem by advising Durvasa to go and apologise to Ambarisha himself. So Durvasa finally came back to Ambarisha and fell at his feet. Ambarisha prayed to the Disc to stop attacking Durvasa. The prayer was heard and thus was the great sage saved from ignominy and extinction.

That the devotee is greater than the Lord Himself is a constant refrain we find among the greatest devotional literatures of the world. In the context of Hinduism it is more than a refrain; it is a fact repeatedly illustrated by many an event in the lives of devotees.

CHAPTER 8: SPEAK TO GOD THROUGH PRAYERS

1. Wonders and Prayers

Miracles are one aspect of religion – and there are so many of them in every religion – which the rational mind rebels against. In fact, more often than not, any discussion of Science and Spirituality is likely to end up into a debate on miracles. If you probe carefully into someone who is disinclined towards spirituality and if you scratch below the surface you will find that the real reason is disbelief of what is usually called a miracle and a consequent distaste for anything that is termed supernatural. The concept of *Avatara* (divine descent or manifestation) – so special to Hinduism – is another part of the miracle story which drives away the skeptic. That God can descend to the earthly level of manifestation, live amongst us like one of us, eat and drink like all of us, beats the imagination of a 'scientific' mind. But this is where one may see the other side of Man. In addition to the scientific-rational side of the human personality each human being has also a 'super-natural' or extra-sensory side. Many would not accept this until they have the experience themselves. This is where Hinduism has a contributing factor. The entire atmosphere is full of such anecdotes and histories. Each family has experience to narrate. Modern minds may ascribe all this to mere superstition and naivete. But try visiting one of the famous retreats or residences of great *AcAryas* and religious leaders. Listen to the personal stories of the people present there, - not necessarily permanently, but who are visiting just like you. Listen to how each was not a 'believer' once and how the same person was later 'converted' by an inexplicable force. Throw away the frills and exaggerations which the person is likely to make because of his close involvement with the story. Finally one would come out with a feeling of daze, awe and reverence. The moral of all this is: *Have the will to suspend your disbelief*. Try to gather as much information as you like from those who have had the experience. Then come to your own conclusions.

The most well-known divine descents in Hindu tradition are those of Rama and Krishna. But each such descent has its own purpose and its own natural style of behavior and teachings Throughout his life Rama never declares himself as an *Avatara* though the sages of His time believed Him to be so. He behaves like an ordinary mortal but exhibits extraordinary human qualities and lives the life of an ideal person. On the other hand the *Avatara* of Krishna loses no time in declaring Himself to be God on earth. In fact He announces it to the father and mother of the child-to-be-born in the most dramatic way, as a producer of a play would introduce the Director of the play. He performs miracle after miracle, almost for the asking. His life is full of apparent contradictions and only the really blessed ones in his lifetime recognize him as the manifestation of the supreme. Coming to our own times we have it on the authority of the personal experiences of several devotees that fully evolved beings like Ramakrishna, Aurobindo,

Ramana Maharshi, Kanchi Maha-swamigal and Sathya Sai Baba cannot but be manifestations of the Supreme Divinity.

The natural questions that usually arise in the mind of a modern rational human being are many. Some of them could be the following:

If all these are *Avataras* of Divinity why have all the problems of the suffering world not been solved? Why are people still suffering? If God has come down on earth why is He allowing suffering to continue? Why do we fight right before his eyes? Having manifested on earth, why does'nt He solve our problems?

These questions certainly rise, at one time or another, in all thinking minds who are eager to understand Divinity and its purpose. But we forget we think of these questions only in relevance to an *Avataraa*. Why is it the same questions are not asked in respect of that all-knowing omnipresent Divinity irrespective of whether He comes down on earth as a manifestation or not? Even when Divinity is in its own heaven, surely it is aware of all the sufferings man is subject to. So why does it not remove our sufferings by a stroke of its magic power? Thus posed the question looks childish. It now looks like the questions frequently asked by non-believers to throw doubts on the existence of God namely,

> **If God exists but cannot remove our suffering then he is not God; If God exists and would not remove our suffering then he is not kind; If God exists and should not remove our suffering then he is not the boss; If God exists and suffering also has to exist then he is not the only Truth.**

These are only rhetorical statements which do not take into account the fact that a God, if He is really God, should not be judged from our human norms of right and wrong, justice and injustice -- for the very simple reason that no human has either the database or the holistic view that the divinity must surely have of the universe and its contents. Even in our day-to-day activities we come across incidents which bear testimony to the presence of this holistic objective in the Powers that are beyond us.

So then, what is the purpose of a descent of Divinity on earth? It is only to establish faith in the existence of a higher Reality and the truth of spiritual laws, so that man may have the strength to turn towards righteousness and steadfastly work for salvation of himself and his contemporaries. If the Supreme Reality in the form of either the Omnipresent Divinity or an *Avatara* solved all our problems of poverty and disease, would that be the end of our problems? No. The cure of our bodily illnesses or of our poverty would still leave us spiritually as we were, at the same level of consciousness and spiritual evolution as before, so that very soon we would be at one another's throats. The same chaotic world will continue. A God can perhaps convert the entire ocean water, or at least a large part of it, into oil, so that the fuel problems of the world can be solved immediately, but even God cannot give a guarantee that no crazy man would throw a lighted cigarette in that sea of oil, because man has the free will to do so. If God had really a purpose in descending on earth, it would be only to clear the way for our spiritual growth!

Jack Hawley in his *Reawakening the Spirit In Work* says: “People who have been around the God-men of the 20th century, who are known to perform ‘miracles’ are of the opinion that they are personally experiencing the even more unbelievable miracle of transformation that is taking place within themselves - and they are seeing and feeling and hearing of the countless, deep personal transformations occurring within the throngs of people at the ashram and around the world. Many come to observe the miracles and stay on to experience the great personal growth that accrues to those who come. The miracles force an expansion of consciousness: it is like opening the gates in our scientific stalls and being invited to gallop out beyond our limits. We are reminded that we need to shift our beliefs, that there is more to this life than we think we know.”

One may wonder why we are not asking the question: If God exists and did create the universe what was His purpose in such a creation? In fact this is an important question which occupies the mind of every scientist who investigates into the frontiers of science leading him into questions of spirituality and God. The *MuNDaka*-Upanishad answers this question by citing three analogies for the relationship between the universe and the Godhead, *Brahman*, which is the origin of the universe according to the Upanishads. The three analogies are contained in the verse: *Mu.U.*, I - 1 - 7:

Just as the spider emits its own saliva to build its web and withdraw it; just as plants grow on earth naturally without any effort; just as hairs grow on a man spontaneously, so also the universe emanates from the Imperishable *Brahman*.

The first analogy raises the doubt that the Ultimate may have a purpose, like the spider. No, says the second analogy. But the latter raises another objection questioning whether *Brahman*, the Ultimate, is unconscious or inert like the Earth. To answer this, look at the third analogy. Hair grows on a man without effort or strain, so does the universe sprout from *Brahman*, just as an extraneous projection of His *Shakti* or *prakRti*.

The most complete incarnation of God in Hinduism is supposed to be the descent of Krishna. The most comprehensive popular scripture in Hinduism is the Mahabharata. The most-often quoted Hindu scripture is the B.G.. That these three together encompass a large part of the mythology, literature and philosophy of Hinduism is surely well-known. But what is not usually noticed is their subtle mutual dependence. It is as if the *Gita* and the Mahabharata were made for each other. Without Krishna as the Director-cum-actor the story of the Mahabharata would have been just a family feud long forgotten. Without the backdrop of the Mahabharata story the *Gita* would have lost all its contextual reference and would have been just one more wave in the ocean of Upanishads. Without the culmination in the divine exposition at the most crucial point in the story, the story of the epic would not have reached epic proportions. Over and above all this is the importance of two great supernatural events without which none of the three would be what they are today in the Hindu milieu. One is the critical scene in Dritarashtra’s assembly where the entire bunch of great men of the times, each great in his own way, had to remain dumb witnesses to the worst-ever downfall of *Dharma* and also to the most miraculous protection of the princess’s honor that came from the only Savior of *Dharma*, the living divinity of that age. The other event is the unfolding of the Universal cosmic

Form of the Lord on the battlefield, without which the *Gita* itself would have missed all its spiritual sanction. The Mahabharata without the miraculous scene of the protection of the honor of Draupadi would just be some dry history and the *Gita* without its wonderful eleventh chapter, called the *Yoga* of the showing of the Cosmic form, would be just a lifeless lecture on the subtleties of individual, social and political ethics. These two miracles may therefore be considered as of great fundamental value.

A philosopher or an intellectual may rise by successive steps of reasoning to the level of understanding an unchanging *Atman* which is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. A true devotee also is ready to grant that there is a Supreme Power who controls everything. But the vast majority of people are neither philosophers nor intellectuals nor are they convinced devotees of the Lord. They believe in God only when that God expresses Himself through miracle-healing or through inexplicable phenomena. It is a moot point whether Jesus or Krishna would be held in as much esteem as they are today if their stories were totally devoid of miracles! But what we consider to be miracles are not miracles for Divinity. From the viewpoint of Divinity what appears to be a miracle for us is just a normal expression of the infinite love with which Divinity always overflows. The human mind as a single isolated factor is a microcosmic and insignificant speck in the vastness of total experience and it cannot in that isolated state understand the subtlety of religious spirituality, much less solve a single problem of either itself or of humanity.

The value of prayer can never be overstated. No one can reveal God to another. But by revealing the value of prayer and inculcating the habit of prayer we place ourselves in a position to receive God-experience, in due time. Spiritual experience can come only through the correct understanding of prayer. Prayer is the point of contact with God. Silent prayer is the preparation of consciousness for the experience of Divinity within. We should tune ourselves from childhood well enough so that at adult age we are ready to receive the inevitable message that unhappiness and suffering are necessary for the unfolding of the soul within and to stand that unhappiness and suffering, prayer is the nutrition needed. From the age of 5, the practice of silent prayer should become a daily routine for a child irrespective of the denomination or religion to which the child belongs or does not belong. The habit of prayer must be made a second nature. This should not be left for the child to learn by itself after it reaches adult age -- as is the experience of many a materialist adult who has learnt things the hard way and then, turned to the ways of the Orient in the past few decades. This is where it is not possible to accept the plea of the rationalist that, to pray or not to pray should be left to the individual for a decision on his own, when he becomes an adult. The plea assumes that each man, without standing on the shoulders of the men of earlier times, begins all over again to learn all that the earlier civilization has already discovered and recorded for us to take the torch from there. That is not the way Man has ascended to the present state of knowledge.

Question:The daily practice of Hinduism allows and sustains prayers to God, particularly to the deities enshrined in the temples; for example, O God, if such and such a good thing happens to me I will come to your temple and offer worship, and so on. Does not this practice smack of a commercial deal? Is it not questionable?

There are two kinds of such prayers. One kind is when we go and offer what we want to offer to the deity or the temple and then pray that we should achieve the ambition in our mind. But the other kind is more commercial. It would not offer the offering until the object of the desire is fulfilled. This second kind is the one which is practised more often. In the case of the first kind at least our trust in God has some credibility. In the second case there is no difference between this deal with God and the deal with a partner in business. Perhaps in reality one trusts the business partner more than one trusts God! It is only religious and spiritual evolution that can change these habits. But look at it from God's point of view, if there be one such. He created you, me and all and He is waiting there for us to come back to Him and ask Him for what He is always ready to give, namely the ultimate *moksha*. Instead, we go to Him and ask for all the petty things of the world. And the irony and agony of God is **He keeps on giving all the things we want so that ultimately we may want what He wants to give us**!

2. Selections from Narayaneeyam

To dwell on the subject of symbiotic verbal expression of Bhakti as understood and practised by an advaitin, the following 36 verses have been selected from *Na.*, (shortly, Na.) the great poetical work of Narayana Bhattatiri, who lived in the 16th and 17th centuries. This work is an inimitably faithful epitome in 1036 Sanskrit verses of Shrimad BhA., in such a masterly fashion that the epitome itself is considered as sacred as the original, which contains 18000 verses. In 1587 C.E. Bhattatiri took the paralysis of his *Guru* on himself and then to get rid of his illness, he composed the Na. sitting in front of the idol of Krishna at Guruvayoor temple, where on the 100th day of the composition, he was blessed by the Lord with a darshan and also a complete cure of his illness. In all the works of Bhattatiri, the Absolute Transcendental is Krishna, the deity of *Guru*vayoor in the state of Kerala, India. He is usually referred to as *Guru*vayoor-appan by devotees throughout the world. Those who believe in advaita should not have any qualms in conceiving of Guruvayoor-appan, (or for that matter any deity of a temple) as THE manifestation of The Transcendental Absolute.

It is generally thought that advaita is just a philosophy and *bhakti* is a way of life. In my personal experience of having seen my father Sri R. Visvanatha Sastri live his life, I feel that the advaitic attitude is also a way of life and (according to me, as I understood him) THE way of life. It is the continuing PRACTICE OF THIS ADVAITIC ATTITUDE by my father that convinced me that the expression of true *bhakti* has to be advaitic in essence. In fact Adi Shankara says (Vivekachudamani–33). that contemplative living in one's natural state, that is the divine state, is *bhakti*.

'svasvarUpA-nusandhAnaM bhaktir-ity-abhidhIyate'.

I have seen my father practise it (perhaps) all his life – he was already 45 when I was born, and when I was 29 he shed his mortal coil.

The 36 *shloka*s that have been selected from Na. are mostly expressions of *bhakti* but, with my experience of my father's life, I can see how Bhattatiri must have felt and lived.

These *shloka*s have a running thread of the advaitic spirit and attitude. In fact Bhattatiri transforms philosophy into scintillating poetry. His is a philosophy of advaita which is devotional, almost like (in the devotional aspect) the one which Shankara himself followed in his own life, though, Bhattatiri's understanding of the advaita concept has shades of the Vaishnava philosophy in it. The *Shloka*s and their meanings are listed below in the order in which I have sequenced and remembered them. This is, however, not their sequential order in the text. The sequence below is a subjective choice. It is so because I feel that this way it gives expression to my feeling towards the Lord and to my conviction that it is leading me – mark it, 'leading me' – to that distant goal of realisation of NON-DUALITY.

#1. (Ref. Na. : 100 – 10)

yogIndrANAM tvad-angeSh-vadhika-su-madhuraM mukti-bhAjAM nivAso
bhaktAnAm kAma-varSha-dyu-taru-kisalayaM nAtha te pAda-mUlaM
/nityaM citta-sthitaM me pavana-pura-pate kR^iShNa-kAruNya-sindho
hR^itvA nissheSha-tApAn pradishatu paramAnanda-sandoha-lakshmIM //

Tr. Oh Lord! To the great yogins, Thy feet are the most beloved of all Thy limbs. They form the abode for the emancipated ones. For the devotees they are like the celestial tree which yields them all their wants. Oh Lord of *Guru*vayoor! Oh Krishna! Oh Ocean of Mercy! May those feet of Thine ever rest in my heart, destroy all my sufferings and bestow on me the treasure of Supreme Bliss!

Comment. The first ten of this series of 36 *shloka*s constitute a variety of different prayers to the Absolute Lord Krishna. These prayers are intended to help us embark on the divine path to Realisation. This first one offers prostrations to the lotus feet of the Lord. Quite fittingly we are asking for the Lord's Grace to descend on us by figuratively asking for the Lord's feet to rest in our heart. Here the heart is the spiritual heart. The spark of the Absolute is already there, whether we recognise it or not. whether we want to admit it or not. By requesting God to have his feet rest in our heart we are only praying that His omnipresence there may be 'felt' by us.

#2. (Ref. Na.: 92 – 9)

GangA Gita ca gAyatry-api ca tulasikA gopikA-candanaM tat
sAlagrAmAbhi-pUjA para-puruSha tathaikAdashI-nAma-varNAH /
etAny-aShTApy-ayatnAny-api kali-samaye tvat-prasAda-prasiddhyA
kShipram-mukti-pradAnIty-abhidadhur-R^iShayas-teShu mAM sajjayethAH //

Tr.: Oh Supreme Lord! there are just eight items, namely, GangA, Gita, *GAyatrI*, Tulasi leaves, sandal paste, the worship of *sAlagRamaM*, (the fast on the day of) Ekadasi, and Divine names. These eight, declare the sages, are the easy and quick means of salvation, in this age of kali-yuga, as they secure Thy abounding grace. May I be intensely devoted to them all!

Comment: This asks for *karma*-yoga with the stamp of *bhakti*. There is a folk-lore *shloka* (See also the Section on 'Satyam JnAnam anantam brahma' in the Chapter 'The Absolute As It Is') which says:

'when the four that begin with the consonant 'ga' are integrally present, the four being GangA (the river Ganges), *Gita*, GAyatrI and Govinda (standing for God's name) – then there is no rebirth'.

Bhattatiri adds to these four, another four.

In the orthodox traditions initiated by Adi Shankara, five main divinities are worshipped through a sophisticated ritual called pancAyatana-*pUjA*, meaning, worship at five altars. Here the divinities are worshipped not in their human-like forms but in certain symbols in the form of stones, which are nothing but certain rock formations available in specified locations in India. The Sun-God, sUrya, is taken as inherent in certain crystals normally found in Vallam in Tamilnadu. The Mother Goddess, *shakti*, is represented by the svarNamukhi stone found in the bed of the river of that name in the Andhra region of South India. *Vishnu* is worshipped in the sAlagRama (mentioned in Bhattatiri's verse) stone that can be had in plenty on the bed of the river Ghantaki in the Himalayas. Ganesa is the red *shonabhadra* stone found on the bed of the river Sone flowing into the Ganges. Finally shiva is the bANa-linga found in the Omkarakunda of the river Narmada, near the island of Mandhata. The pancAyatana pUja tradition may be taken as an intermediate stage between the worship of Godhead with form and the worship of the formless, because the symbols of worship as rock formations have certainly a form but they are also formless in that they have no parts like face, eyes, body, hands and feet. It is as though the devotee trains himself to take the mind from the formful to the formless while at the same time allowing full scope for one's devotional feelings. Also note that in the Vaishnava tradition, the emphasis is on the *sAlagRama* to such an extent that the other four of the *pancAyatana* tradition are mostly omitted.

#3: (Ref. Na.: 94 - 10)

aikyaM te dAna-homa-vrata-niyama-tapas-sAnkhya-yogair-durApaM
tvat-sangenaiva gopyaH kila sukR^iti-tamAH prApurAnanda-sAndraM /
bhakteSh-vanyeShu bhUas-svapi bahumanuShe bhaktim-eva tvam-AsAM
tan-me tvad-bhaktim-eva dR^iDaya hara gadAn kR^iShNa vAtAlayesha //

Tr.: That state of supremely blissful union with Thee, which is difficult to obtain through (disciplines like) charity, (ritual) sacrifices, observance of vows, self-control, austerities, knowledge (sAnkhya), and yoga, was attained by the blessed *gopi*kas (cowherdesses) of Brindavan, through just personal attachment to Thee as their own beloved. Numerous are Thy other devotees, but it is this loving personal devotion of the *gopi*kas that has received Thy highest appreciation. Therefore Oh Krishna, Oh Lord of Guruvayoor, May Thou strengthen devotion in me and destroy my ailments.

Comment. This underscores the importance of personal involvement with the Lord in intimate terms, from the heart of hearts. All the formalities of our religious observances pale into insignificance before such a personal relationship with God. So whatever we may do, we must strive to see that this innate feeling of love for the Lord is the undercurrent. This is the only thing He asks from us. More than intellectual understanding of the various nuances of scriptures and philosophy, what He expects from us is this self-negating love for Him and all that stands for Him, namely, the universe. One may recall here *Gita* Ch.IX – 34:

manmanA bhava madbhakto madyAjI mAM namaskuru /
mAmevaiShyasi yuktvaivaM AtmAnaM mat-parAyaNaH //

meaning, Saturate your mind with me; be devoted to me; work for me; bow down to me; having thus united your whole self with me, taking me as the supreme goal, you shall come unto me. This self-negating love has been defined by Narada in his *bhakti*-sutra, as follows.

guNa-rahitaM kAmanA-rahitaM pratikShaaNa-vardhamAnaM avicchinnaM
sUkShma-taram anubhavarUpaM.

Meaning, (This pure love is) without attributes, without the poison of desire, every moment increasing, unbroken, subtlest, and of the nature of sheer immediate experience.

4. (Ref. Na. : 91 - 4):

bhakter-utpatti-vR^iddhI tava caraNa-juShAM sangamen-aiva pumsAM
AsAdye puNya-bhAjAM shriya iva jagati shrImatAM sangamena / tat-
sango deva bhUyan-mama khalu satataM tan-mukhAd-unmiShadbhiH tvan-
mAhAtmya-prakArair-bhavati ca sudR^iDA bhaktir-uddhUta-pApA //

Tr.: It is by association with Thy devotees that *bhakti* germinates and develops in men who have auspicious deeds to their credit, just as in this world it is the relationship with prosperous men in various ways that leads to the prosperity of people. Therefore Oh Lord, may I always have contact with holy men, and through their outpourings of narratives and hymns dealing with Thy excellences, may I, with all my sins effaced, become established in firm and whole-hearted devotion.

Comment. What is being prayed for is sat-sangh, the company of the noble and the holy, which is the first step on the ascent in the ladder of spirituality. Narada waxes eloquent on the mental attitudes of these noble souls: (Bhakti sutra 68) When (they) with choked emotion, body covered with horripulation and tears flowing down, converse with each other in broken words, they sanctify their family and tribe, nay the very earth itself they come to glorify. *"kaNTAvarodha-romAnchAshrubhiH parasparaM lapamAnAH pAvayanti kulAni pR^ithivIM ca."*Hearing the narratives and hymns dealing with God's excellences is the '*shravaNa*' regimen prescribed as No.1 of the nine manifestations of *bhakti*, enunciated long ago, by the greatest devotee of all times, Prahlada. 'By hearing and singing the glories of the Lord, even while engaged in the activities of the world', says Narada again in Sutra 37:

"loke'pi bhagavad-guNa-shravaNa-kIrtanAt".

#5 . (Ref. Na. : 91 - 5):

shreyo mArgeShu bhaktA-vadhika-bahu-matir-janma-karmANi bhUyo
gAyan kShemANi nAmAny-api tad-ubhayataH pradrutaM pradrutAtmA /
udyad-hAsaH kadAcit-kuhacid-api rudan kvApi garjan pragAyan
unmAdIva pranR^ityann-ayi kuru karuNAM loka-bAhyash-careyaM //

Tr.: Oh! Lord, Deign to bestow on me that state of mind, whereby, preferring the path of devotion as the best among the various paths for spiritual attainment, I fervently chant again and again Thy names and accounts of Thy achievements in Thy incarnations, so sanctifying and spiritually elevating, until with my mind melting with loving emotion, I shall sometimes laugh, sometimes cry, sometimes shout, sometimes sing aloud and sometimes dance in ecstasy, and move about like a mad man who has lost his link with society and its conventions.

Comment. It is by such devotion one comprehends 'Who is He? What is He?' (cf. *Gita* XVIII – 55). Usually when one asks God for something, that is what is meant by petitional prayer and most of our prayers are petitional prayers. But that prayer itself has to be supported by intense devotion. We never ask of God to give us that intensity of devotion; because we think we have it. This is where our free will comes in the way, without our knowing that it does so. We never ask God to give us *bhakti*. Bhakti means the decision to go back to the source, knowing full well that it is the royal road to the goal of spirituality. And He waits and waits (-- this is the 'agony of God', talked about in Christianity --) until we ourselves, by our own free will, decide to go back to Him. In the meantime He gives us some petty things we have always wanted, so that in due time we may begin to want what He wants to give us. It is in this context, one asks for *bhakti* to be granted to us by Himself.

The mind that attaches to God automatically liberates. The thesis here is that such a mind is already in the transcendental experience of bliss, it need not wait for the so-called mukti. Listen to Adi Shankara: (S.L.81). It appears Narayana Bhattadri has echoed this *shloka* of Shankara.

kamcit-kAlam-umAmahesha bhavataH pAdAravindArcanaiH
kamcit-dhyAna-samAdhibhishca natibhiH kamcit kathA-karNanaiH /
kamcit-kamcid-avekshaNaishca nutibhiH kamcid-dashAmIdR^ishIM
yaH prApnoti mudA tvad-arpita-manA jIvan sa muktaH khalu //

Meaning, Sometime in worshipping Your lotus feet, sometime in meditation and concentration sometime in offering obeisance, sometime in listening to stories about You, sometime in looking at Your form, sometime in singing Your praise - he who gains such a state in exhultation, having surrendered his mind to You, O Lord, he is verily liberated even when alive.

#.6 (Ref. Na. : 2 - 10):

tvad-bhaktistu kathA-rasAmR^ita jharI nirmajjanena svayaM
siddhyantI vimala-prabodha-padavIM akleshatas-tanvatI /
sadyas-siddhikarI jayaty-ayi vibho saivAstu me tvat-pada-
prema-prouDhi-rasArdratA drutataraM vAtAlayAdhISvara //

Tr. For, Devotion to Thee stands (as a unique path) in that it bestows purity and enlightenment directly and immediately, without any pains, by submerging one in the flood of delight generated by hearing and remembering Thy deeds and excellences. Oh Lord of *Guru*vayoor! May I soon attain that tenderness of heart produced by intense love for Thy feet!

Comment. The two attributes of *bhakti*, namely '*svayam siddhyantI*' (= leads to the goal by itself) and '*sadyas-siddhikarI*' (= immediately successful), -- these two are what made Tulsi, one of the greatest exponents of *bhakti* as a philosophy, to extol it above jnAna or yoga, or vairAgya (detachment or dispassion). We may recall and enjoy his powerful metaphor in this connection. JnAna, yoga and vairAgya are all masculine in conception (according to the grammar of the language) and so they cannot ultimately succeed as *bhakti* can, over the enchantments of *mAyA* which is feminine. *mAyA*, says the poet of the Rama-carita-manas, is only a *nartakI* (dancer) whereas *bhakti* is the beloved of his hero Sri Ram. The 'feminine' *bhakti* can conquer *mAyA* whereas the 'masculine' *jnAna*, yoga,and vairagya, etc. however powerful they may be, tend to succumb to her charms!

#. 7 (Ref. Na. : 91 - 1):

shrI-kr^iShNa tvat-padopAsanam-abhaya-tamaM baddha-mithyArtha-dR^iShTeH martyasy-
Artasya manye vyapasarati bhayaM yena sarvAtmanaiva / yat-tAvat-tvat-
praNItAn-iha bhajana-vidhIn-Asthito moha-mArge dhAvan-napy-
AvR^itAkShaH skhalati na kuhacid-deva devAkhilAtman //

Tr. Oh Lord Krishna ! Service to Thee is what I consider to be the best option for Man afflicted with miseries caused by the wrong acceptance of ephemeral values as true and enduring. Only that way, the Lord removes our fear of the cycle of births and deaths, completely and for ever. Oh Lord of Lords ! Oh Soul of all beings! A person who steadily follows the path of devotion promulgated by Thee, will be able to dash forth through the world's delusive paths, even with closed eyes, without slipping anywhere!

Comment. This thought is an exact echo of BhA. 11th Canto, 2nd chapter *Shloka*s 33-35. The confidence that one has in the Lord becomes the foundation for all spiritual growth. The purpose of including this *shloka* among the chosen 36 is to strengthen that foundation for oneself.

There is an interesting keyword here which is full of meaning. It is '*sarvAtmanA*' at the end of the second quarter of the verse. It means 'with heart and soul'. It has been translated, in the context, as 'completely and for ever'. When the Lord removes our fears there is no half-hearted work there. It is total and complete. This word and this context should be aligned with '*sarva-bhAvena*' in *Gita* XVIII – 62. He says there:

'tameva sharaNam gaccha sarva-bhAvena bhArata'
meaning, Seek only Him for refuge, with all your being.

'*sarva-bhAvena*' means here: 'convert all your emotions into devotion and direct that to God. Love Him as your master, your friend, your parent and your lover; seek Him in all these attitudes (bhAva).' Cf. *Gita* IX – 18:

gatir-bhartA prabhus-sAkshI nivAsaH sharaNaM suhR^it /prabhavaH
praLayaH sthAnaM nidhAnaM bIjam-avyayaM //

meaning, 'I am the goal, the supporter, the lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the foundation, the treasure-house, and the seed imperishable.'

Thus when we surrender to him 'with all our being' (*sarva-bhAvena*), He removes our fears 'totally and completely' (*sarvAtmanA eva*).

#8. (Ref. Na. : 94 - 9):

yadyal-labhyeta tat-tat-tava samupahR^itaM deva dAso'smi te'haM tvad-
geh-onmArjan-AdyaM bhavatu mama muhuH karma-nirmAya-meva / sUryAgni-
brAhmaN-AtmAdiShu lasita-catur-bAhum-ARadhaye tvAM tvat-prem-
Ardratva-rUpo mama satatam-abhiShyandatAM bhakti-yogaH //

Tr. Oh Lord! Whatever comes into my possession, I offer it unto Thee. I am Thy servant. Let me repeatedly do with utmost sincerity and interest such devotional duties as cleaning Thy temple, Thy altar! Let me perform the worship of Thy four-handed form conceived as manifesting in the solar orb, in fire, in holy men and in the *Atman*!. Let my mind be ever in communion with Thee through devotion, which consists in the melting of heart into a continuous stream of love ever flowing towards Thee!

Comment. The sun and fire have always been considered holy in all religions and in Hindu culture and literature, starting from the time of the Vedas, they each take the first place in physical representations of the Absolute. The very first prayer of the Rig veda is to 'agni', the God of fire. He is the symbol of the Divine Will, Power and Force. He is the messenger who connects the offerings of the humans with their divine destinations. He also brings the messages and presents from the Divine to the human world. The last prayer of Man before he leaves the body should be to 'agni', according to the very last verse of the shukla Yajur Veda. The Sun is another major visible expression of Divine Light, representing the infinite power, majesty and glory of the Almighty . But mark it, it is not the visible sun or the visible fire that is worshipped or considered as the Absolute. Behind the physical sun there is the concept of a surya-devata and behind the physical fire there is the concept of an agni-devata. That is where, as the poet says here, the Lord is reachable to us.

#9. (Ref. Na. : 97 - 3):

tvad-bhAvo yAvadeShu sphurati na vishadaM tAvadevam hyupAstiM
kurvan-naikAtmya-bodhe jhaTiti vikasati tvan-mayo'haM careyaM /
tvad-Dharmasy-Asya tAvat-kimapi na bhagavan prastutasya prNAshaH
tasmAt-sarvAtmanaiva pradisha mama vibho bhakti-mArgaM manojnaM //

Tr. As long as the experience that 'Thou art the All' does not arise, shall I continue to perform your worship thus. Soon shall I attain to this experience of the unity of all existence. Thereafter I shall move about with a complete identification with Thee. Oh Lord! For one traversing the path of Thy (Bhagavata) Dharma there cannot be any downfall or destruction. Therefore bestow on me the capacity to follow the path of *bhakti*, the most fulfilling of all spiritual paths.

Comment. Here the thought is that *bhakti* matures into the ultimate jnAna. To speak of two paths *bhakti* and jnAna as if they are mutually exclusive is contrary to the conclusions of Krishna in the eighteenth chapter of the *Gita*. Once the path of jnAna becomes second nature, it includes the feelings of *bhakti* also. This is the essential content of the *Gita*. Refer *Gita* XVIII – 49-55. To say that the centrality of Bhattatiri's

poem is only Bhakti is to miss this focus of his. It is clear that Bhattatiri here indicates that the ultimate goal of any path, including *bhakti*, is what Krishna enjoins in *Gita* VI – 30:

yo mAM pashyati sarvatra sarvaM ca mayi pashyati /tasyAhaM na praNashyAmi sa ca me na praNashyati //

meaning, He who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me, never becomes separated from me nor do I become separated from him.

#10. (Ref. Na. : 94 - 4):

tval-lokAd-anya-lokaH kvanu bhaya-rahito yat-parArdha-dvayAnte
tvad-bhItas-satyaloke'pi na sukha-vasatiH padmabhUH padma-nAbha /
evaM bhAvepy-adharmArjita-bahu-tamasAm kA kathA nArkANAM
tan-me tvaM cchindhi bandhaM varada kr^ipaNa-bandho kr^ipA-pUra-sindho //

Tr. There is no sphere other than Thy transcendent state of Vaikuntha that is free from the fear of death and downfall. Even satya-loka (the world of the highest level of divine existences, where the creator Brahma lives), Oh Lotus-navelled One, is not found to be a secure and happy place by the Lotus-born Brahma at the end of two parArdhas (that being the life-span of a Brahma). What then to speak of those who, in consequence of their unrighteous deeds, have incurred numerous sins and reside in hells. Therefore Oh Giver of boons! Friend of the Lowly! Ocean of Mercy! Deign to cut off all my attachments to worldly life.

Comment. Recall: Certain is death for the born ('*jAtasya hi dhruvo mR^ityuH'*) (*Gita* II – 27). Even Brahma, though the first-born, is born and the end awaits him. What begins has to end. Every movement of the Sun across the sky implies the passing away of our lives. This continual reduction in the remaining part of our lives is something that the scriptures are never tired of pointing out, because even after all this, we tend to forget this especially in crucial moments of self-consciousness, anger, jealousy, passion or disappointment.

#11. (Ref. Na. : 99 - 10):

avyaktaM te svarUpaM duradhigama-tamaM tattu shuddhaika-satvaM
vyaktaM cApy-etad-eva sphuTam-amR^ita-rasAmbhodhi-kallola-tulyaM
/sarv-otkR^iShTAm-abhIShTAM tad-iha guNa-rasen-aiva cittaM harantIM
mUrtiM te samshraye'haM pavanapura-pate pAhi mAM kR^iShNa rogAt //

Tr. Thy nature as Absolute Being is not manifest to the senses or the intellect. It is therefore difficult to grasp or attain. But Thy Being manifest in shuddha-satva (spiritual purity) as Krishna is like the wavy surface of the ocean of Blissful Spirit, definite, clear and easy to grasp. Therefore I resort to the worship of this form of Thine which is superior to anything manifested and which is lovable and enchanting by its sweet beauty and other blessed attributes. Oh Krishna, Resident of *Guru*vayoor! Deign to free me from my ailments.

Comment. This is the explanation why followers of advaita have no reservation about the worship of the saguNa form of God while striving to comprehend the nirguNa concept of

Godhead. Bhattatiri, through this *shloka*, sets at nought all the nagging dilemmas of a doubting advaitin, in regard to worship of the Formful. The real Nature of the Absolute Godhead is 'duradhigama-tamaM', that is, to reach out to it is most difficult, almost impossible. Recall, *Gita* Ch.XII – 5: Greater is the trouble of those whose minds are set on the manifest; for the goal, the unmanifest, is very hard for the embodied to reach.

klesho'dhikatarasteShAM avyaktA-sakta-cetasAM /
avyaktA hi gatir-dukhaM dehavadbhir-avApyate //

The philosophy of advaita has two facets. One is the 'kevala-advaitam' and the other is 'bheda-abheda-advaitam'. The former one will not even talk of any attribute-ful form, as a possibility in the absolute sense. In other words, even *ISvara* belongs to a lower reality than the Absolute. And because, everything other than the Absolute is non-real, *ISvara* has to be non-real. But the bheda-abheda-advaitam says that the wavy surface of the ocean even though it appears as if it can be distinguished from the ocean, IS the ocean. There is no distinction between them. If we have to make a distinction between them that distinction is one 'without a difference'. In other words, bheda (difference, distinction) appears 'without a real difference'. God is the highest being in devotional thought and He must therefore be Absolute also, even as the wavy surface and the ocean are one and the same in spite of the apparent difference. Bhattatiri's advaitic leanings are in this category.

#12 & 13. (Ref. Na. : 2 – 1 & 2 -2):

sUrya-spardhi kirITam-Urdhva-tilaka-prodbhAsi-phAlAntaraM
kAruNyAkula netram-Ardra-hasitol-lAsaM sunAsApuTaM /
gaNDOdyan-makarAbha-kuNDala-yugaM kaNToj-jvalat-kaustubhaM
tvadrUpaM vanamAlya-hAra-patala-shrIvatsa-dIpraM bhaje //

keyUrAngada-kankaNottama-mahA-ratn-AngulIy-Ankita-
shrImad-bAhu-catuShka-sangata-gadA-shankAri-pankeruhAM /
kAncit-kAncana-kAnci-lAnchita-lasat-pItAmbar-AlankR^itAM
Alambe vimal-Ambuja-dyuti-padAM mUrtiM tav-ARticchidaM //

#12. Tr. I adore the form of the Lord with head crowned with a diadem that rivals the brilliance of the sun; with forehead whose beauty is enhanced by the upright sandal paste mark; with eyes wetted by mercy; with face lit up by a benevolent smile; with nose well-proportioned and attractive; with ears adorned with fish-marked pendants that add lustre to the cheeks by their reflection; with neck wearing the luminous jewel Kaustubha; and with chest resplendent with a variety of decorations like the wreath of flowers from the wilderness, lines of pearl necklaces and the auspicious mark called Srivatsa.

#13. Tr. I take refuge in Thy ineffable form glowing as it does with ornaments like keyUra (bracelet on the upper arm), angada (armlet) and kankana (bangle) and finger-rings of precious jewels; with four sacred arms holding in them the mace, the conch, discus and the lotus; with waist wrapped in yellow silk fastened by a golden waist band; and with feet that resemble exquisite lotuses and remove the woes of the devotees.

Comment. These two *shloka*s are to be read together. They are very suitable subjects for meditation. When the boy Dhruva (five years old) goes to the forest for doing penance and getting to see the Lord, the sage Narada accosts him, tries to dissuade him from the

tortuous task of a penance in the solitary world of the forest, but finally finds him determined; and at that point he unfolds to the boy how he should meditate and on what form. The description that Narada gives to the boy is famous in the BhA. for the charming visualization (of the inaccessible Personality of Godhead) that it gives for meditation. Bhattatiri here goes one step further, by lyrically immortalising the beauty of form that one can see by going and having darshan at *Guru*vayoor. It is to this attractive form that Arjuna wanted the Lord to return, when he was overwhelmed, and frightened, by the cosmic vision which he had the rare opportunity to witness: 'I desire to see thee as before, Oh Lord, crowned, bearing a mace, with the discus in hand, in thy former form only, having four arms , Oh thousand-armed cosmic form' (*Gita* Ch.XI 46):

kirITinaM gadinaM cakra-hastaM
icchAmi tvAm draShTum-ahaM tathaiva /
tenaiva rUpeNa catur-bhujena
sahasra-bAho bhava vishva-mUrte //

Those who believe only in the attributeless Absolute might have problems in visualizing divine forms as described in these two stanzas but it must be said to the credit of the *bhakti* movement in India from the 7th century onwards, that it is this personalized intimacy with the Lord that has shown thousands of devotees the path of spirituality and led them thereon to the ultimate path of jnAna. And this proves Bhattatiri's point made in *Shloka* No.11 of this selection.

#14. (Ref. Na. : 2 - 3):

yat-trailokya-mahIyaso'pi mahitaM sammohanaM mohanAt
kAntaM kAnti-nidhAnato'pi madhuraM mAdhurya-dhuryAd-api /
soundary-ottarato'pi sundara-taraM tvad-rUpam-Ashcaryato-py-
AshcaryaM bhuvane na kasya kutukaM puShNAti viShNo vibho //

Tr. Oh All-pervading Being! Who is there in all the universe that will not be entranced by this Thy surprisingly wonderful Form, which is superior in excellences to all objects considered great in the three worlds; which is more charming than the most charming of entities; whose splendour outshines every form of brilliance; and whose sweetness and beauty would put to shame all other objects that are noted for such qualities.

Comment: The emotional heights to which this and the earlier verses may be associated with, cannot be dismissed as myths created by poet. It would be as foolish as saying that the Himalayas or the Ganges have been formed by spade work by some groups of men. The cumulative devotional impact on the human consciousness that these verses and the descriptions can and do create should not be missed for the growth of spirituality. To indulge in hair-splitting criticism of their methodology or relevance would only be missing the wood for the trees.

#15. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 1):

yasmin-netad-vibhAtaM yata idam-abhavad-yena cedaM ya eta-d
yo'smAduttIrNa-rUpaH khalu sakalam-idaM bhAsitaM yasya bhAsA /

yo vAcAM dUra-dUre punar-api manasA yasya devA munIndrA
no vidyus-tattva-rUpaM kimu punar-apare kr^iShNa tasmai namaste //

Tr. Oh Krishna, to Him my salutations, who is the substratum on which this world of manifestation appears; who is the root cause of it; into whom it dissolves; who manifests as all the world but none-the-less transcends them all and forms the Light of Consciousness by which, and to which, they are revealed; who is far beyond the scope of exact descriptions by words and conception of mind; whose true nature neither the devas nor the sages have known, not to speak of others; to Him, Krishna, my salutations.

Comment. It is legitimate to ask for a quick list (and many have so asked) of all the attributes of the Ultimate God or Godhead in Hinduism. Here is an answer in this *shloka*. (Also see *shloka* 17 below). But, as the author himself acknowledges, the true nature of God cannot be fathomed by any one. The Lord Himself says: There is no end to their detailed description (*Gita* Ch. X – 19): 'nAstyanto vistarasya me'. In trying to depict the undepictable, one uses words but the Vedas themselves say 'Words recede from (describing) It' ('*yato vAco nivartante*' – T.U.). So Bhattatiri also says: '*yo vAcAM dUra-dUre*', that is, 'It is far beyond the scope of words'.

To describe the undescribable, you cannot but borrow ideas and even words from the Upanishads. The words '*sakalam-idam bhAsitaM yasya bhAsA*' of the second line reminds one of the famous line from Mundaka Upanishad II – 2 – 10: 'Through Him all of them shine, and through His expression, everything is expressed' :

'tameva bhAntaM anubhAti sarvaM tasya bhAsA sarvam-idaM vibhAti'.

#16. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 8):

yad-bhItyodeti sUryo dahati ca dahano vAti vAyus-tathAnye
yad-bhItAH padmajAdyAH puna-rucita-balIn-Aharante'nu kAlaM /
yen-aiv-AropitAH pra~N nija-padam-api te cyAvitArash-ca pashcAt
tasmai vishvaM niyantre vayam-api bhavate kR^iShNa kurmaH praNAmaM //

Tr. Fearing whom the sun rises, fire burns and wind blows; for fear of whom Brahma and other deities perform their cosmic functions as obligatory punctual offerings; by whom all these deities are installed in their places at the beginning and removed afterwards – to Thee Oh Lord, who thus regulates the whole universe, my salutations.

Comment. This is a actually an echo of T.U. II -8 – 1

'bhIShA'smAd-vAtaH pavate; bhIshodeti sUryaH ; bhIshA'smAd-agniS-
cendraSca; mR^ityur-dhAvati pancama iti' ,

meaning, Out of His fear the Wind blows; out of fear the Sun rises; out of His fear runs fire, as also Indra, and Death, the fifth.

The ultimate cause of fear must itself be indestructible, since a contrary supposition will lead to an infinite regress. And such an eternal agent is The Absolute. This *shloka* is also an epitome of a whole bunch of *shloka*s (3 – 29 – 40 to 44) in the BhA. in the chapters on Kapila's philosophical teachings to his mother.

#17. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 9):

trailokyaM bhAvayantaM triguNamayam-idaM tryaksharasy-aika-vAcyaM
trISAnAm-aikya-rUpaM tribhir-api nigamair-gIyamAna-svarUpaM /
tisrovasthA-vidantaM triyuga-jani-jushaM trikram-AkrAnta-viSvaM
traikAlye bheda-hInaM tribhir-aham-aniSaM yoga-bhedair-bhaje tvAM //

Tr. You manifest the three worlds through the three guNas. You are the One who is implied by the three letters of the praNava. You are the one Being who manifests as the three Deities, Brahma, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. It is your Nature that is sung and glorified in the three Vedas. You are the Pure Consciousness that witnesses the three states of waking, dream and sleep. You incarnate yourself in the three yugas of treta, dvapara and kali. You measured the whole universe with your three strides. You are changeless in the three parts of Time, namely, past, present and future. I worship You always with the three forms of yoga – *karma*, *bhakti* and jnana.

Comment. The list of attributes (see *shloka* 15) of the Lord is continued here with poetic excellence. One cannot but recall an analogous poetic flourish from the Tamil poet Kamban (K.R. VI - *iraNiyan-vadaip-paDalaM*, verse 25), put in the mouth of Prahlad, the greatest devotee of all times (See the Section on Prahlada Charitam in Chapter 7).

#18. (Ref. Na. : 91 - 3):

bhItir-nAma dvitIyAd-bhavati nanu manH kalpitaM ca dvitIyaM
tenaikyA-bhyAsa-shIlo hR^idayam-iha yathAshakti buddhyA nirundhyAM /
mAyAviddhe tu tasmin punarapi na tathA bhAti mAyAdhi-nAthaM
tat-tvAM bhaktyA mahatyA satatam-anubhajan-nIsha bhItiM vijahyAM //

Tr. Fear arises from the consciousness of a second (thing) different from oneself. This consciousness of (such) a second is indeed an imaginary super-imposition of the mind. Therefore I am trying my best through discrimination to discipline the mind in the consciousness of oneness. But when this power of discrimination is overpowered by Thy *mAyA*, no amount of effort is of any avail in getting established in Unitary Consciousness. Therefore Oh Lord, I am trying to overcome the fear of samsAra by constant and devoted worship of Thee, the Master of *mAyA*.

Comment. This is one of the key *shloka*s that trumpet the highest advaita concept, among the 36 of this selection. The sentence '*manaH-kalpitam dvitIyaM*' (The consciousness of a second object is an imaginary superimposition of the mind) constitutes the 'brahma-sUtra' of advaita. Bhattatiri clearly makes the point that the unity of the *JIva* with the supreme Spirit is the ultimate goal. But he hastens to add that the same is not reachable by any one directly but only through the love and service of Him and His Grace. It is only by God's Grace that non-dual consciousness is obtained. The devotee merges in His Being by His grace, The 'I' disappears in Him and 'He' is left. The becoming merges in the Being. It is not vice versa. This is what one might call Realistic advaita, to be subtly contrasted with 'kevala-advaita'.

#19. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 5):

shabda-brahmeti karmety-aNuriti bhagavan kAla ityAlapanti
tvAmekaM vishvahetuM sakala-mayatayA sarvathA kalpyamAnaM /
Vedantair-yattu gItaM puruSha-para-cidAtmAbhidhaM tattu tattvaM
prekshA-mAtreNa mUla-prakR^iti-vikR^iti-kR^it kR^iShNa tasmai namaste //

Tr. Oh Lord! Being the One that has become the many and therefore conceivable in any form, You, the Cause of all the universe, are being identified by different names, such as, the Primeval Sound, Karma, Atom, Time, and *Atman*. Oh Krishna, salutations to that Supreme Truth also described in the Vedantic scriptures as *Purusha* (Indwelling Spirit), Para (Supreme Being), Pure Consciousness and so on, who by a mere glance have set the mUla-prakR^iti in motion to diversify itself into its various evolutes that form the manifested universe.

Comment. The Transcendence and Immanence of the Absolute, are the two foundational concepts on which the entire Vedanta rests secure. **Without this philosophical understanding given to us by the Upanishads, as capsuled here by Bhattatiri, in beautiful poetry, a devotional attitude may degenerate into a narrow cult and fanaticism.** An intellectual understanding of the Upanishadic doctrine of the Absolute *Brahman* with a concurrent identification with that Absolute of one's Personal God, worshipped and loved, is what saves one from a limited understanding to which some devotees succumb, when they try to rationalize their devotion to their Personal God. However, thanks to the Hindu tradition, even the ordinary man has, in spite of his illiteracy, the necessary trace of this philosophical understanding passed on to him through osmosis by the very atmosphere in which he lives.

Note the words '*prekshA-mAtreNa*' (by a mere glance) in the fourth quarter. The cosmic process of manifestation into a multiplicity from the 'original' single entity may cause a certain amount of confusion in our 'rational' thinking. Because it is difficult to coordinate this idea of creation, which has obviously a built-in duality in it, with the concept of non-duality of the Self irrespective of the so-called space, time, and causation – or, using a pregnant phrase, 'in spite of duality'. There are several passages in the Upanishads which inspire Shankara to pour forth his thoughts on this subject in his commentaries. Let us quote one such passage, from his *bhAshya* on A.U., where he meets the objection: Did the Self cease to be one? Why is the past tense used, in stories of creation, where it is said: 'In the beginning this was but the absolute Self alone … It thought (*sa IkShata*) …'.

"Though even now that very same single entity (the Self) endures, still there is some distinction. The distinction is this: The universe in which the differences of name and form were not manifest before creation, which was then one with the Self and which was denotable by the single word and idea 'Self' has now become denotable by many words and concepts as well as by the single word and concept 'Self', because of its diversification through the multiplicity of names and forms. Foam is denoted by the single word and concept 'water', before the manifestation of names and forms distinct from water; but when that foam becomes manifested (as an entity) distinct from water, owing to the difference of name and form, then the very same foam becomes denotable by many words and concepts, viz., foam and water, as well as by only one word and one concept, viz., water. The same is the case here". (A.U. Shankara Bhashya I – i- 1)

#20. (Ref. Na. : 1 - 3):

sattvaM yat-tat-parAbhyAm-aparikalanato nirmalaM tena tAvat
bhUtair-bhUtendriyais-te vapuriti bahushaH shrUyate vyAsa-vAkyaM /
tat svacchatvAd-yad-acchAdita-parasukha-cid-garbha-nirbhAsa-rUpaM
tasmin dhanyA ramante shruti-mati-madhure sugrahe vigrahe te //

Tr. Sage Vyasa has repeatedly declared that Thy form along with its accessories is constituted of pure sattva, without any admixture of the others (rajas and tamas). Because of this absolute purity, Thy form gives an unobstructed revelation of its underlying essence of Consciousness-Bliss. Enlightened men delight to contemplate on this, Thy Divine formful manifestation, which is easy to grasp and which is all sweetness to those who think or hear about it.

Comment. Here Bhattatiri probably differs from advaita regarding the nature of the Ultimate Reality. Bhattatiri displays two different minds in his rendering of Na.. Sometimes he talks as if he is an advaitin to the core (as in our *shloka* No.18). But some other times he talks, as in this *shloka* 20, as if he is identifying *Brahman* with God, that is, *ISvara*. In other words, the saguNa *Brahman* (*Brahman* with attributes) is the Absolute *Brahman*, for him in this and many other *shloka*s of his. Since the *advaita* view anyway is that saguNa *Brahman* is a means to the ultimate goal of *nirguNa Brahman* (attributeless *Brahman*), this *shloka* fits into our selection for contemplative practice.

#21. (Ref. Na. : 1 - 5):

nirvyAporo'pi niShkAraNam-aja bhajase yat-kriyAm-IkShaNAkhyAM
tenaivodeti lInA prakR^itir-asatikalpA'pi kalpA''di-kAle /
tasyaH samshuddham-amshaM kamapi tam-atirodhAyakaM sattva-rUpaM
sa tvaM dhR^itvA dadhAsi sva-mahima-vibhavAkunTha vaikunTha rUpaM //

Tr. Oh Birthless One! Even Though You are without any activity by nature, You do activate spontaneously by just a glance, the prakR^iti, at the beginning of every new cycle of creation – the prakR^iti that is latently abiding in You, without anyway affecting You, as if it were a non-existent entity. Oh Lord of VaikunTha, assuming the pure sattva aspect of the PrakR^iti, which because of its purity does not in the least hide your glories and majesties, You have manifested Yourself as this divine form.

Comment. Pure sattva is used in contrast to material sattva, which along with rajas and tamas becomes the source of all matter creation. Pure sattva, according to Vaishnava philosophy, is self-luminous, of the nature of cit (intelligence) and Ananda (bliss). The Divine Form is constituted of this pure sattva. This fact is agreed to by advaita philosophy also. But the Vaishnava philosophy holds that it is in fact identical with the Absolute. In advaita philosophy, the Absolute transcends the three guNas. This is a substantial difference between the non-dualist philosophy and the qualified-non-dualist philosophy.

#22. (Ref. Na. : 91 - 2):

bhUman kAyena vAcA muhurapi manasA tvad-bala-preritAtmA
yadyat kurve samastaM tadiha paratare tvay-yasA-varpayAmi /

jAtyApIha shvapAkas-tvayi nihita-manaH-karma-vAg-indriyArtha-
prANo vishvaM punIte na tu vimukha-manAs-tvat-padAd-vipravaryaH //

Tr. Oh All-Pervading Being! Whatever I do with the body, speech and mind prompted by thy Power (expressing as tendencies from within), all that I offer at the feet of Thee, the Supreme Spirit. Even if a person be of low birth, if he has resigned his mind, power of action, speech, senses and vital energies at Thy feet, he sanctifies the worlds. But not so even if he is a *Brahman*a by birth, if his mind is turned away from Thee.

Comment. Now comes what exactly should be done by a seeker of the Ultimate. To start on this path one has to remember *Gita* IX – 27 constantly:

yat-karoShi yad-ashnAsi yajjuhoShi dadAsi yat /
yat-tapasyasi kaunteya tat-kuruShva mad-arpaNaM //,

meaning, 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as an austerity, Oh Arjuna, do it as an offering unto Me'.

#23. (Ref. Na. : 91 - 6):

bhUtAny-etAni bhUtAtmakam-api sakalAn pakshi-matsyAn mR^igAdIn
martyAn mitrANi shatrUn-api yamita-matis-tvan-mayAny-AnamAni /
tvat-sevAyAM hi siddhyen-mama tava kR^ipayA bhakti-dArDyaM virAgas-
tvat-tattvasy-Avabodho'pi ca bhuvanapate yatna-bhedaM vinaiva //

Tr. Having disciplined my mind to see Thy presence in everything, I shall salute all beings – the five elements and all the products of their combinations as also these living beings like birds, fish, animals and men, including friends and enemies. Thus following the path of devotion, I shall, through Thy Grace, attain to deep-rooted God-love, dispassion and knowledge of Thy truth-nature simultaneously.

Comment. All religious and spiritual observances finally are tantamount to the development of the attitude whereby one sees the Lord in everything. 'He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, never becomes separated from Me nor do I become separated from him' (*Gita* VI – 30). 'He sees, who sees the supreme Lord existing equally in all beings, the unperishing within the perishing' (*Gita* XIII – 27). 'Because he, who sees the same Lord equally dwelling everywhere, does not destroy the self by the self, he goes to the highest goal' (*Gita* XIII – 28).'He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, hates none. To the illumined Soul, who sees everything as a manifestation of his own Self, how can there be delusion or grief since he sees only oneness?' (I.U. , Verses 6 and 7).This *shloka* therefore, may be used for continuous meditation and fixed contemplation by dwelling (*nidhidhyAsana)* on the meaning.

#24. (Ref. Na. : 96 - 8):

nirviNNaH karma-mArge khalu viShama-tame tvat-kathAdau ca gADhaM
jAta-shraddho'pi kAmAn-ayi bhuvana-pate naiva shaknomi hAtuM /
tad-bhUyo nishcayena tvayi nihita-manA doSha-buddhyA bhajans-tAn
puShNIyAM bhaktimeva tvayi hR^idaya-gate manGkShu nanGkShyanti sangAH //

Tr. Oh Lord of all the worlds! Even after developing revulsion to the extremely difficult life of adherence to Vedic ritualism and cultivating deep faith in the discipline of listening to Thy deeds and excellences, I am not able to abandon all the desires of my heart. I shall therefore try to overcome these by resorting to them with a discriminative mind that is fully aware of the harmfulness and is firmly fixed on Thee. I shall strengthen my devotion to Thee; for when You reside in the heart, worldly attachments perish in no time.

Comment. The significant words here are: 'kAmAn naiva shaknomi hAtuM' that is, 'I am not able to cull out my desires'. The is the million dollar problem of every one. And the only remedy is as stated here: Discriminative mind; awareness of the harmfulness of the non-spiritual path; and strengthening of one's devotion to the Lord. This is the royal road to spirituality. Has not the Lord said, 'Even if the worst sinner worships me, with devotion to nothing else, he too should indeed be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved'? cf. *Gita* Ch.IX – 30 :

api cet sudurAcAro bhajate mAm-ananyabhAk / sAdhurevea sa mantavyaH samyag-vyvasito hi saH //

'He has taken the first step', says the Lord. And Sathya Sai Baba used to say: 'If he takes one step towards me, I will take ten steps towards him!'. So when temptations are there for the mind to stray away from its spiritual moorings, the only monitor for the discriminative mind is the Lord within. Even Shankara, for the benefit of us ordinary mortals, gives us strong forceful prayers, like the following one, that one can imbibe and make it come from one's innermost heart. This one is *Shloka* No.20 of S.L.*:*

sadA mohATavyAm carati yuvatInAM kuca-girau
naTaty-AshA-shAkhAsu aTati jhaTiti svairam-abhitaH /
kapAlin bikSho me hr^idaya-kapim-atyanta-capalaM
dR^iDhaM bhaktyA baddhvA shiva bhavad-adhInaM kuru vibho //

meaning, Oh Lord Shiva, (The mind) constantly dwells on the sensualities of the woman's form, and dances on the hopes and desires generated by such thoughts. Oh Lord with the skull as the begging bowl, please deign to bind my extremely fickle monkey-mind, tightly with (the rope of) devotion and make it totally subservient to You!

#25. (Ref. Na. : 96 - 9):

kashcid-kleshArjitArtha-kShaya-vimala-matir-nudyamAno janoughaiH
prAgevaM prAha vipro na khalu mama janaH kAla-karma-grahA vA /
ceto me dukha-hetus-tad-iha guNagaNaM bhAvayat-sarva-kArIty-
uktvA shAnto gatastvAM mama ca kuru vibho tAdR^ishIM citta-shAntiM //

Tr. (with added notes): Once a Brahmin, who had acquired great wealth through hard work, happened to lose it all. His experience (generated in him discrimination and renunciation, and) attaining purity of mind thereby, (he took to the life of an avadhUta (or all-renouncing naked ascetic). Persecuted by the populace (for his strange ways of life) he said: 'The cause of my sufferings is neither these people, nor time nor *karma*, nor planets. My own mind is the cause of my misery. (Itself a product of the Gunas of prakriti), it causes all actions to be done and superimposes these and other products of the

gunas (on the *Atman*)'. Thinking thus, he remained at peace. Oh Lord! Deign to give me also that kind of mental poise!

Comment: Here is a practical advaitic philosophy of action in daily life. This portion of the BhA. is called BhikShu *Gita*. There the Bhikshu (renunciate) mentions 24 persons and things as his *guru* and also mentions what each of the 24 stood for, in his understanding. For the Bikshu *Gita* itself in original one can go to BhA. Skanda 11, Ch.7 *Shloka* 32 to end of Ch.9.

#26. (Ref. Na. : 96 - 10):

elaH prAg-urvashIM praty-ati-vivasha-manAH sevamAnash-ciraM tAM
gADhaM nirvidya bhUyo yuvati-sukham-idaM kShudram-eveti gAyan /
tvad-bhaktiM prApya pUrNaH sukha-taram-acarat tadvad-uddhUya sangaM
bhaktottamsaM kriyA mAM pavana-purapate hanta me rundhi rogAn //

Tr. King Pururavas, the son of Ila, was deeply involved in a love affair with Urvasi, a heavenly damsel. After spending a long time in her company, he developed a mood of extreme renunciation and came to the realization that the so-called sex-enjoyment is most trivial and wretched. Attaining to devotion for Thee, and through that to life's fulfillment, he moved about happily, singing Thy glory. Likewise, Oh Lord of *Guru*vayoor, uprooting all my sensuous tendencies, make me the best of Thy devotees, and free me from all my ailments!

Comment. We should remember that it is the Lord's solemn promise to all humanity, '*na me bhaktaH praNashyati*' (My devotee never perishes), in *Gita* IX – 31. One should understand this promise carefully. There are many devotees whose physical and mental suffering in the world is all too obvious. Then what does this promise of God mean? It means 'My devotee never perishes – in the absolute sense'. That is, there is no slip-up for him in the spiritual ladder. Maybe the Lord doubtless takes care of our mundane needs also, as it did happen in the case of Bhattatiri himself. His ailment was cured miraculously. But that should be taken as nectar flowing from His Grace and not as 'fulfillment of one's demands'. In fact, to expect Him to recompense us for our 'devotion' is not 'devotion'.

#27. (Ref. Na. : 99 - 5):

no jAto jAyamAno'pi ca samadhigatas-tvan-mahimno'vasAnaM
deva shreyAmsi vidvAn pratimuhur-api te nAma shamsAmi viShNo /
taM tvAM samstaumi nAnA-vidha-nuti-vacanAir-asya loka-trayasyA-py-
UrdhvaM vibhrAjamAne viracita-vasatiM tatra vaikuNTha-loke //

Tr. Oh Lord *Vishnu*! No one either born till now or yet to be born, could possibly know Thy greatness in its fullness. What is possible at all to do – and that I am trying – is to chant Thy name again and again, knowing that it promotes one's spiritual evolution. With numerous hymns of praise I am therefore invoking Thee, who resides in the glorious sphere of Vaikuntha that transcends all the three material worlds.

Comment. A *sahasra-nAma* is a litany of one thousand names (of God). There are plenty of them, at least one for each particular divinity. These long, 'streamlined' poems, are

densely packed with meaning -- apparently endless recitals of the Lord's names, glories and splendours, with no sacrifice of poetic elegance and grace. The rhythmic sound effects and the elevating moods that these can produce must be heard and experienced to be believed. *See the Chapter on Countless Names for the Nameless.*

#28. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 6):

satven-AsattayA vA na khalu sad-asatvena nirvAcya-rUpA
dhatte yA sAv-avidyA guNa-phaNi-mativad-vishvadR^ishyAva-bhAsaM /
vidyAtvaM saiva yAtA shruti-vacan-lavair-yatkR^ipA-syanda-lAbhe
samsAr-AraNya-sadyaH struTana-parashutAM eti tasmai namaste //

Tr. Ignorance (avidyA) which cannot be described either as existing or non-existing or as a combination of the two, apparently manifests, just like the snake seen on the rope, this whole world of objectivity (along with the sense of identification of the 'self' with aspects of it like the body, mind, etc.). But when the current of Thy Grace sets in, this avidyA itself gets transformed into vidyA (Knowledge) which, with the help of a few drops of the vedic declaration, becomes a veritable axe for clearing the forest of samsAra.

Comment. The term 'avidyA' is the veiling of the Self. It is not just absence of vidyA, knowledge. It is the consciousness 'I do not know'. The real Self of man has nothing to do with the vicissitudes of existence. By this ignorance of not knowing who the real Self is, man confounds his outer self with the real Self. An identification with the buddhi makes him the cogniser. An identification with the mind makes him the thinker. An identification with all forms of vitality like prANa, makes him the doer. Thus the entire samsAra is due to this avidyA. Is it something that is absolutely real? No, because it vanishes the moment one is enlightened. Is it something that is absolutely non-existent? No, because we have the consciousness 'I do not know'. Thus it is neither existent nor non-existent. It cannot be both, because that would imply self-contradiction. That is why the scriptures say that it is ('anirvacanIya') undecidable. The only thing we can be sure is that it will disappear once by God's Grace the very same consciousness 'I do not know' gives place to the consciousness 'I am the Self'.

On this point of 'vidyAtvam saiva yAtA' let me quote a highly relevant and illuminating paragraph from VidyaraNya's article on 'Introduction to the Upanishads' - in fact it is the last paragraph in his article going to about 70 pages. We may title it: 'Ignorance itself gets transformed into knowledge – Vidyaranya'. The English translation is by Alladi Mahadeva Sastry.

" …. A thing is said to be unknown, as the Vedantic authorities declare, when veiled by ajnana or ignorance; and it is said to be known when illumined by the organ of knowledge. And both these facts are illumined by the Witness, by the unfailing Consciousness. Every thing always presents itself to the Witness, to Consciousness, either as known or unknown. Such is the main truth taught in the scriptures. Thus it is Consciousness by which a thing is realized as unknown; and by all organs of knowledge we cognize what has remained unknown. …. The result of a thing being unknown is the veiling of the thing and nothing else. The inert unconscious matter being in itself veiled and dark, how can there be a new veiling of it? On the other hand, Consciousness, which is luminous, is affected by something else veiling it, just as, a white cloth is affected by the

dyeing ink. Rahu may darken the moon, never the dark clouds. Thus it is Consciousness that is the unknown and the inert matter is formed of ajnana. Whatever is the cause or the effect should be regarded as the inert matter. By the whole of that inert matter the self-luminous Consciousness is veiled. By Consciousness thus veiled, both itself and the inert matter shine forth, just as both the moon and Rahu – the shadow eclipsing it – shine by the moon. Thereby Consciousness neither becomes extinct nor loses its light, any more than the moon. If the moon becomes absorbed by the shadow of Rahu, it is only to our vision that it appears to be so absorbed. Similarly, to the vision of the ignorant alone, Consciousness appears to be unknown. Thus it is the one self-existent Consciousness which is the thing unknown before by the senses etc., and on whose becoming known by them afterwards, they constitute the sources of knowledge. Though all organs of knowledge proceed to grasp only the pure Consciousness, still, all of them apprehend it only in association with some inert material forms in virtue of their many blemishes. Though the eye proceeds only to perceive the mother-of-pearl, still, owing to its blemishes, it perceives but partially the mother-of-pearl in association with silver. The eye and all other organs of knowledge, except the Upanishads, are defective. The knowledge to which they give birth apprehends Consciousness only in association with colour etc. Accordingly, just as the deluded man thinks his own perception of illusory silver as an authority to its existence, so men think with regard to colour and other material forms which they perceive. Philosophers agree that every cognition is true as far as the substratum is concerned; it is only with regard to its mode, -- as for instance, when the mother-of-pearl is perceived in the mode of silver, -- that illusion occurs. So all cognitions are right so far as the One Existence – the one substratum of all attributes – is concerned; they are wrong so far as they concern the colour etc., which is perceived along with the One Existence. Thus, by sound reasoning, it is to be concluded that all organs of knowledge are such only as regards *Brahman*; while the ignorant regard them as such with regard to the colour etc., in the same way that the deluded man thinks that his vision, which is right only as far as the basic substance – viz., mother-of-pearl – is concerned, is right in perceiving silver. Those who know how to reason hold that the senses etc., are right as far only as they grasp *Brahman*, whereas the unreasoning men declare that they are right as far only as they perceive colour. In short, because Consciousness is the thing before unknown, it is the thing to be known by all organs of perception, which operating, the thing ceases to be unknown. ….”

#29. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 7):

bhUShAsu svarNavad-vA jagati ghaTa-sharA-vAdike mR^ittikAvat
tattve samcintyamAne sphurati tad-adhunApy-advitIyaM vapuste /
svapna-draShTuH prabodhe timira-laya-vidhau jIrNa-rajjoshca yadvat
vidyA-lAbhe tathaiva sphuTamapi vikaset kR^iShNa tasmai namaste //

Tr. By reflecting on the true nature of things, it is recognised that even when this world of multiplicity is perceived, it is only Thy non-dual Self (as their material cause) that is apprehended, just as gold is seen when ornaments are perceived, and clay, when mud-pots are seen. When knowledge dawns, what happens is that this fact becomes crystal clear (through the total sublation of the objective world into Thyself, their substraturm) just as the true nature of dream objects becomes evident on awakening, and of the worn-out rope, on the disposal of darkness. To that Self, Oh Krishna, my salutations!

Comment. The right vision is that which sees the one-ness amidst the plurality of experience. '*sarva bhUteShu yenaikaM bhAvam-avyayam-IkShate'* (*Gita* XVIII – 20). Perception of difference arises because of the recognition of name and form. The enlightened one sees the tile, the stone and the golden brick, all in the same way. This equanimity of vision is the ultimate goal of spirituality. When a wooden elephant is presented to a child the child is carried away by imaginations about the elephant. But we shall be only children spiritually if we cannot see the wood for the elephant. The normal human being is distracted by the multiplicity of appearances and is still, as it were, in a dream state, where he refuses to believe there is a more real world outside of his dream. Because, no dreamer realizes, while dreaming, that he is dreaming. He cannot rise beyond the glamour of plurality that confronts him and does not perceive there is an essential unity in all that he sees. This kind of knowledge sees the multiplicity of things only in their separateness and variety of operation. It looks at the jumble of pieces of knowledge as if they are forcefully put together. The scriptures prescribe, on the other hand, that perception wherein you see only the Lord's presence in it; you hear only the melody of His music, you taste only the sweet nectar flowing from His Grace; you smell only the fragrance of the dust of His feet; and you touch only the touch of the divine hand of Fearless-ness (abhaya-hasta). This is the advaita-*bhakti*. The contemplation of this *shloka* can be expected to lead to such advaita-*bhakti*.

#30. (Ref. Na. : 94 - 6):

jIvan-muktatvam-evam-vidham-iti vacasA kiM phalaM dUra-dUre
tannAmAshuddha-buddher-na ca laghu manasaH shodhanaM bhaktito'nyat / tan-me
viShNo kR^iShIShTAs-tvayi kR^ita-sakala-prArpaNaM bhakti-bhAraM yena syaM
mankShu kimcid-guru-vacana-milat trvat-prabodhas-tvadAtmA //

Tr. Of what good are mere words defining the condition of one liberated in the embodied state itself, that is, even when alive? It is only a name as far as a person of impure mind (is concerned). Other than *bhakti* there is no easy way of attaining to purity of mind (needed for attaining to that state). Oh *Vishnu*! May Thou therefore deign to bestow on me intense devotion characterized by absolute surrender of all deeds to Thee. With the purity of mind gained thereby and the instructions of the *guru* I shall soon attain to true enlightenment and union with Thee.

Comment. The concept of *JIva*n-mukta is central to advaita. The blessed soul whose ignorance has been destroyed by the realization of *Brahman* in the nirvikalpa-samadhi becomes liberated at once from the body if there is no strong momentum of past actions (prArabhda-*karma*) left. But if there is, it has to be exhausted by the body experiencing it. Such a person is called a *JIva*n-mukta (liberated when alive). Though associated with the body he is ever untouched by ignorance or its effects. He is established in *Brahman* and recognizes no bondage. He has got the 'dawn of knowledge' mentioned in *shloka* #s 28 and 29 above. His physical body may experience anything. His sense-organs may be affected by blindness, weakness, incapacity, etc. His mind may be subject to hunger, thirst, grief, delusion, etc. Yet he does not consider any of these 'experiences' as real, for he has already known their nothingness. He is like the magician who knows that his performance is all magic and has no real validity. Shankara describes this state in his upadesha-sAhasrI (Metrical Section 10 *Shloka* 13): 'He does not see anything in the

waking state as in sound sleep; though seeing duality, he does not really see it as he sees only the Absolute; though engaged in work, he is really inactive; he and none other, is the knower of the Self'.:

suShuptavaj-jAgrati yo na pashyati dvayam na pashyan-napi cAdvayatvataH / tathA ca kurvan-napi niShkriyash-ca yaH sa Atmavin-nAnya itIha nishcayaH //

Only a Shankara, a Ramakrishna, a Ramana, a Sadasiva Brahmendra, can describe this state; because theirs is a first-person-experience.

Now comes Bhattatiri's punch-line: 'So what? What is it to me?'! And Bhattatiri rightly says 'Let me have the *bhakti*; and let the Lord decide whether I deserve this state of *JIva*n-mukta or not'. And the strategy of action that he describes is the classical surrender of all our deeds to the Lord. '*nimitta-mAtraM bhava'* - be just My instrument of action' – says the Lord. That is the recipe for us, says Bhattatiri.

#31. (Ref. Na. : 94 - 7):

shabda-brahmaNy-ap-Iha prayatita-manasas-tvAM na jAnanti kecit kaShTaM vandhya-shramAste cirataram-iha gAM bibhrate niShprasUtiM / yasyAM vishvAbhirAmAH sakala-malaharA divya-lIlAvatArAH saccit-sAndraM ca rUpaM tava na nigaditaM tA na vAcaM bhriyAsaM //

Tr. There are some with mind wholly absorbed in Sabda-*Brahman* (or study and exposition of the Vedas and other scriptures). But they have no knowledge of Thee (in spite of all their learning). Alas! Their efforts are therefore sterile, and they are like owners of cows that never calve. May I not therefore indulge in the study, exposition or composition of works alien to the description of Thy blissful form and Thy sportive Incarnations, which are universally inspiring and destructive of all mental impurities.

Comment. There is a beautiful *shloka* in *Shiva*nanda-lahari (*Shloka* 6) of Shankara, which carries the same thought, however, in the Master's inimitable style.

ghaTo vA mR^it piNDo'pyaNurapi dhUmo'gnir-acalaH paTo vA tantur-vA pariharati kiM ghora-shamanaM / vR^ithA kaNTakShobhaM vahasi tarasA tarka-vacasA padAmbhojaM shambhor-bhaja parama-soukhyaM vraja sudhIH //

meaning, Whether it is the lump of clay (that is the truth) or the mud-pot, or the atomic fragment of it, whether it is the smoke beyond the mountain (that is the reality) or the fire, whether it is the cloth (that is the ultimate) or the threads (of cotton), how does it remove (man's) suffering? You are wasting your throat on such questions of logic, Oh! Man of intellect! Worship the lotus feet of Lord Shambhu and attain the highest bliss!

#32. (Ref. Na. : 94 - 8):

yo yAvAn yAdR^isho vA tvamiti kimapi naiv-AvagacchAmi bhUman-nevam-cAnanya-bhAvas-tvad-anu-bhajanam-ev-Adriye caidya-vairin /

tval-lingAnAM tvad-anghri-priya-jana-sadasAM darSana-sparshanAdir-bhUyAn-me tvat-prapUjA-nati-nuti-guNa-karm-AnukIrty-Adaro'pi //

Tr.: Oh All-pervading Being! Oh Destroyer of Sishupala! I am not able to comprehend Thy greatness or Thy nature even in the least. But despite my imperfect understanding of Thee, I shall continue to serve Thee wholeheartedly, depending on Thee as my sole support. May I be always blessed with opportunities of seeing Holy Images and contacting congregations of Thy devotees, and be endowed with devotion to the worship, salutation and praise of Thee as also the recital of the deeds and excellences of Thy Divine Self.

Comment. The greatness (yAvAn - who, what?) of the Lord is shown by the Lord Himself by opening out His cosmic form through a divine vision to Arjuna in the 11th chapter of the *Gita*. The nature (yAdRsho - how, of what nature?) of the Lord is described by Himself in the tenth chapter of the *Gita*. Both chapters are difficult to understand, says Bhattatiri.

There are two categories of people in the world: firstly, those who grant the supernatural status (10th and 11th chapters of the *Gita*) of Krishna and therefore all his miraculous deeds, but find it difficult to follow his spiritual teachings in the rest of the chapters of the *Gita* because of its philosophical nuances; secondly, those who seem to be comfortable in studying and learning the philosophy embedded in the *Gita*, but find it difficult to swallow his divine mischief-like miraculous doings. To both these types of people Bhattatiri addresses this *shloka*. He says whether you understand Him or not, whether you can imbibe His philosophy or not, worship Him with all the sincerity you can command. Go through any one of (if possible, all of) the nine forms (described in the BhA. 7-5-23 by Prahlad) in which *bhakti* might be expressed (See the Section on Prahlada Charitam in the Chapter on Gems from Shrimad BhA.).

#33. (Ref. Na. : 98 - 10):

satyaM shuddhaM vibuddhaM jayati tava vapur-nitya-muktaM nirIhaM nirdvandvaM nirvikAraM nikhila-guNa-gaNa-vyanjan-AdhAra-bhUtaM / nirmUlaM nirmalM tan-niravadhi-mahim-ollAsi nirlInam-antar-nissangAnAM munInAM nirupama-paramAnanda-sAndra-prakAshaM //

Tr. There shines Thy Being – eternal, immaculate, ever awake, ever free, desireless, transcending the pairs of dualities, changeless, conserving and manifesting all values, causeless, free from the taint of ignorance, inconceivably great, latent in noble hearts free from attachments, dense with the luminosity (of Consciousness) and inimitable supreme bliss.

Comment. Now we are starting to wind up our selection of 36 *shloka*s. So here comes an exhaustive-looking listing of the 'attributes' of the attributeless *Brahman*, as conceived in the Upanishads. A fitting *shloka* for meditation purposes. Transcendence (T), Immanence (I) and Perfection (P) - - the T, I and P, constituting the TIP of the Iceberg, that is God – are all three in this *shloka*.

#34. (Ref. Na. : 1 - 7):

kaShTA te sR^iShTi-ceShTA bahutara-bhava-khedAvahA jIva-bhAjAm-
ity-evaM pUrvam-Alocitam-ajita mayA naivam-ady-AbhijAne /
no cej-jIvAH kathaM vA madhura-taram-idaM tvad-vapush-cid-rasardraM
netraiH shrotraishca pItvA parama-rasa-sudh-Ambhodhi-pUre rameran //

Tr. Oh Supreme Being! Once I thought that Thy creative activity is a tragic sport, as it inflicts various forms of suffering on embodied beings involved in the cycle of births and deaths, but now I do not think so. For, if there were no creation and therefore no embodied beings, who would have been there to revel in the ocean of unparalleled joy derived from the experience of seeing this Form of Thine replete with Consciousness and of hearing descriptions of Thy glory?

Comment. God ‘descends’ from His pedestal of perfection and assumes an imperfection in terms of a name and form so that we mortals may be guided from our extremities of imperfection onto the path towards perfection. This descent of the Divine from its divine pedestal is called an Avatara. The complete such Avatara is Krishna. What appears before us as a deity in the form of an image is not just an image but it is itself the personification of that Transcendental Absolute. Such divine Images for worship in temples are called ‘*archAvatAras*’ in Vaishnava theology. Great saints and seers (from Prahlada and Ambarisha of yore down to Sage Ramakrishna of modern times) have actually experienced the presence of the Absolute in such ‘*archAvatAras*’.

#35. (Ref. Na. : 1 - 1):

sAndr-Anand-Avabodh-Atmakam-anupamitaM kAla-desh-AvadhibhyAM
nirmuktaM nityamuktaM nigama-shata-sahasreNa nirbhAsyamAnaM /
aspaShTaM dR^iShTa-mAtre punar-uru-puruShArth-AtmakaM brahma-tattvaM
tat-tAvad-bhAti sAkShAd-guru-pavana-pure hanta bhAgyaM janAnAM //

Tr. In the temple of *Guru*vayoor there shines in truth and in reality what appears at first to be a mere image but on contemplation reveals itself to be the condensed essence of Consciousness-Bliss – the veritable *Brahman* Supreme – who is the ultimate end of all human endeavours, to whom there is none comparable, who is ever beyond the limitations of time and space, who is eternally free, and whose nature the numerous texts of the Vedas seek to reveal. Fortunate indeed, is

mankind (that such a manifestation of Divinity exists in its midst as the image of Krishna)!

Comment. The Lord of *Guru*vayoor, is no distant exclusive deity. He is famous as the One deity accessible to all devout, of whatever condition and degree, learned and unlearned. The rituals performed daily and the many temple festivals, round the year, all confirm this impression.

This first *shloka* of Narayaniyam has been hailed by many as pregnant with meanings, devotional, philosophical and esoteric. *Brahman* Supreme is impersonal according to Upanishadic accounts but Bhattatiri believes that it is also simultaneously personal. And because of this conviction he begins to rapturously pour out, in the presence of that deity, his devotional thoughts that have become the now-immortal poem. The very first word '*sAndra*' is notable. '*sAndra*' means thick, dense, violent, intense, soft, bland; crowded with, full to the brim of. This inimitable word is so powerfully expressive that Bhattatiri uses it very often. Not being derived from any other root word, it stands alone as an adjective by itself. In our selection of 36 verses, it occurs in *Shloka* nos. 3, (the *gopis* reached the heights of bliss), 31 (full to the brim with consciousness), 33 (intensely brilliant with incomparable extreme bliss) and here in 36 (condensed essence of consciousness-bliss). In the beginning, that is, in the early stages on the spiritual ladder, one does not see Him at all. Or, even if one happens to see Him, the vision is all vague and diffuse. This is what the word '*aspaShTam dR^iShTa-mAtre'* implies. The truth is not easily perceived, because, everything is mixed up everywhere.

'nAhaM prakAshas-sarvasya yoga-mAyA-samAvR^itaH'
(Gita VII – 25) says the Lord.

That is why the initial pictures and images are all blurred, if at all. But if we persist in our *sAdhanA*, in our pursuit of the search for Truth, He reveals Himself as our own Self. The word 'nitya-muktaM' (eternally free) is significant. The Almighty, by the very definition, is eternally free. Why was it necessary to call Him eternally free? It is the self which is mistakenly thought to be bound and needing release from bondage. So it is necessary to say of the self, that it is eternally free, it is in fact the Self that is nothing but the *Brahman*-principle (*brahma-tatvaM*).

#36. (Ref. Na. : 1 - 2):

evaM durlabhya-vastuny-api sulabhatayA hasta-labdhe yad-anyat
tanvA vAcA dhiyA vA bhajati bata janaH kShudrat-aiva sphuTeyaM /
ete tAvad-vayaM tu sthiratara-manasA vishva-pID-Apahatyai
nishsheSh-AtmAnam-enaM guru-pavana-purAdhIsham-evAshrayAmaH //

Tr. But alas! What a pity that in spite of the easy availability of this rarest of blessings right on hand, human beings, prompted by their base nature, overlook it and pursue worldly objects with all the powers of their body, mind or intellect! But we, devotees, however, shall, with unswerving

devotion, serve the Lord of *Guru*vayoor, Sri Krishna, the soul of all beings, for the total eradication of all the (physical and spiritual) woes of the world.

Comment. The word 'nishsheSha-aatmAnaM' means He is the Self and there is nothing remaining. In other words He is the Self, period. This is the conclusion of advaita. The word '*vishva-pIDApahatyai'* is to be noted. *Vishva-pIDA* is the disease of not recognizing vishvam (universe) as nothing but the Lord Almighty. The cure for it is contained in 'neti neti'. The very universe which is visible to us in our sensory experience should remind us that the Absolute is neither this nor like this. So *vishvam* has to be seen not as *vishvam*, but as the Ultimate itself. That is why it is the very first word in *V.S.*. *Vishvam*, with the meaning 'universe' really means 'that which has entered', the root word being 'vish' to 'enter'. In other words, the Almighty is in it, that is, it is immanent in it. This immanence in everything is the most important concept of Vedanta. More, it defines this most ancient religion: 'God is everywhere; not only that, God is the ONLY ENTITY everywhere'. Of course the ordinary meaning of *vishva-pIDApahatyai* is obvious. All the penance, all the rituals, all the worship are all for the goal of the universal good of the universe. *lokAs-samastAs-sukhino bhavantu.* May the entire universe be happy.

3. Selections from Soundaryalahari

[Note: ***In this Section we take just*** **eight** ***shlokas from Soundaryalahari of Adi Shankara and present the meanings and commentary which were given in Tamil discourse form by Kanchi MahaSwamigal. These have been chronicled in Deivathin Kural by Ra. Ganapathy. I had translated them into English for the advaitin yahoo group in the early years of this decade. Here are excerpts from the translation. The content is entirely that of the Mahaswamigal. The word 'Acharya' used by him refers to Adi Shankaracharya]***

Of Soundaryalahari it may be said that there never was one like it, nor ever will be. It has a perennial charm that does not satiate. And its majestic eloquence is unbeatable. In his bhaja-govindam our Acharya uses very elementary words because it happens to be the alphabet of Vedanta. But here he is describing the undescribable. So he uses words very precisely. Consequently the vocabulary turns out to be difficult. But the words chosen only add to the lilting charm of the poetry that he weaves. The metre used is 'shikariNI', meaning 'that which is at the apex'. It has 17 syllables for each of the four lines.

The concept of 'intense' devotion does not care for the language used, or for the manner of worship. It is the intensity of devotion and depth of feeling that matter. But getting that intensity and depth is the most difficult thing. That is exactly what eludes us. Now that is where the beauty of such blessed poetry like 'Soundaryalahari' excels. Whether you understand it or not, whether you pronounce the words correctly or not, the very attempt itself of reciting it produces in you the needed *bhakti*! This is the word-power of the words of such blessed poetry. The vibrations of the words give us all the material and spiritual success. We have only to keep the objective of *bhakti* steadfast in our minds. Everything else just follows.

#1: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.1:

Shivas-ShaktyA yukto yadi bhavati shaktaH prabhavitum
na ced-evam devo na khalu kushalaH spanditum-api /
atas-tvAm-ArAdhyAm hari-hara-virinchAdibhir-api
praNantum stotum vA katham-akRtapuNyaH prabhavati //

Tr. Only if yoked with *shakti* (even) Lord shiva has the ability to create the world; if not so (yoked), (He) is not capable even to make a move. Isn't it so? Therefore, how is it possible (for) one who has not accrued any (spiritual) merits to do prostrations to or to praise (by hymns) You who are worshipped even by *Vishnu*, Shiva, Brahma and the like?

The bottom line of this *shloka* is that Shiva earns His place and prestige only when He is united with *Shakti*. But the words Shiva and *Shakti* have been placed in the *shloka* in that order, with Shiva first. This indicates that the dependence is mutual; neither of them is to be lower in hierarchy or glory. There is no higher or lower between this original divine couple.

The mutuality of Shiva and *Shakti* should be in our minds all the time. When hard core ideas from philosophy are made into poetic extravaganzas, both for poetic excellence and for liberties taken with a view to making the devotees revel in their devotion, it is natural to exaggerate or make out-of-the-way comparisons. Thus at one time it may be said that Shiva is greater than *Shakti* and at another time quite the opposite. In every one of these presentations one should not forget the equality, nay, the identity of the two. Keeping this clearly in his mind, our Acharya, though he built into the first *shloka* the idea that it was Sakthi who made Shiva move, he takes care to see that the prodding for the 'movement' does not come from outside. She is inside Him and therefore the word 'spandanam'.

The identity of Shiva-*shakti* is important here. Identity does not mean just a union. It is a total oneness. It is identity in the sense there is only one. Being one and only one is what is called 'Aikyam' or identity. In Lalita Sahasranama, after calling Her Shivaa, the next name is Shiva-Shaktyaikya-rUpiNI. This Shiva is only a close fit to the *Brahman* of advaita. So, unionizing with Him, and relating with Him, 'moving' Him, She has done as a couple, all the Creation of the Universe and the monitoring of it. Whenever there is a *Shakti*, there must be a locus standi (Ashrayam, Base) for it. The concept of, say, a *Shakti* of ten pounds of weight does not arise unless there is something to which the weight can be related or referenced. A fragrance or a colour is certainly an abstract *Shakti*, but it has to have an Ashrayam for it to exist as a fragrance or a colour. Thus for every *shakti* there is an Ashrayam. The *Shakti* that is the origin for all the known *Shakti*s has itself an Ashrayam and that is the Shivam-*Brahman*.It is the *Shakti* of that *Brahman*. So it cannot be separated from its Ashrayam. You cannot separate the whiteness from milk, or the taste of milk from milk. So by the expansion of *Shakti* whatever happens there is Shivam also in that expansion. In all actions of *Shakti* Shivam has to be present.

It is Shiva Himslf who gets reflected in the mirror of *mAyA* and becomes ambaal. If you ask the advaitin, "What is this *mAyA*", he will reply: 'It is not possible to say what it is.

You know it is called *mAyA*, magical ! So it will not allow us to understand it'. The ShAkta school will say: 'Even *mAyA* is only a part of ambaal.' *MAyA* occurs only at the stage where Shivam becomes the *JIva*, according to ShAktam. That the *JIva* does not know it is itself Shivam, is *mAyA*. It is the work of *mAyAShakti* that makes it incomprehensible for *JIva* to know the Permanent Eternal One and mistake the ephemeral things as permanently existing.

We shall take the positive-negative phenomenon of photography. In the positive, light is light and dark is dark. In the negative on the other hand, light is dark and dark is light. That is the Ignorance which shows what exists as not existing and non-existence as existence. This is the handiwork of *mAyA* ! We are all submerged in this *mAyA* and since ambaal is responsible for this, we call Her, *mAyA*.

#2: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.4:

tvad-anyaH pANibhyAM abhaya-varado daivata-gaNaH
tvam-ekA naivAsi prakaTita-varAbhIty-abhinayA /
bhayAt trAtuM dAtuM phalam-api ca vAnchhA-samadhikaM
sharaNye lokAnAM tava hi charaNAveva nipuNau //

Tr. The multitude of gods other than You grant abhaya (=fearlessness) and boons by the hands. You are the only one not at all exhibiting – boon (giver) – fearlessness (giver) – by your 'mudras'. Oh Refuge for all the worlds indeed Your feet alone (are) expertly efficient to protect from fear and also to give the fruit, the result more than what one wishes.

She doesn't have to give 'abhaya' and 'vara' by Her hands. Her divine feet alone are capable of granting what other deities do by their hands.

Note the expert use of the words 'sharaNye' and 'charaNau'. The first comes from the word 'sharaNa' meaning refuge. She is the Ultimate Refuge for the whole world. The second word comes from 'charaNa' meaning 'foot'. Her feet are the Refuge; because the feet themselves are capable of granting our wishes, by just being there. Just as flowers, without 'doing' any action, radiate fragrance.

When one asks for the removal of fear, that is, fearlessness (abhaya), the positive response from the deity could only be the removal of fear; there is nothing more to be given. On the other hand, whatever other wish one asks for fulfillment, there can always be something more than that wish and thus She – nay, just the grace of Her divine feet - gives the devotee more than what he wants.

#3: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.7:

kvaNat-kAnchI-dAmA kari-kalabha-kumbha-stana-natA
parikshhINA madhye pariNata-sharac-candra-vadanA /
dhanur-bANAn pAshaM sRNimapi dadhAnA karatalaiH
purastAd-AstAM naH puramathitu-rAho-purushhikA //

> Tr. (She who is) wearing the girdle with jewelled bellstinkling and jingling (of jewels), (She who is made to) lean forward by the breasts that resemble the forehead of an young elephant, (She who is) slender in the middle (of the body), (She whose) face is like the autumnal full moon, (She who is) wearing in Her hands the bow and arrows, the noose(and) also the spear (She who is) the 'I'–ness (=Ego, in the positive sense) of the destyroyer of (the demon named) pura — i.e. of Lord Shiva, may She appear before us.

The third line of the *shloka* means 'Holding by the hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the spear'. 'sRNi' means 'ankusha', the spear. These four are the specifics that determine now the deity of dedication in this stotra. And so we may be certain now that the deity that is being praised is the deity of the ShrI vidyA *mantra*, namely lalitA-tripura-sundari or Kameshwari. If we are not very 'technical' about it, it is also the same as Raja-Rajeshwari. When ambaaL is in this form, She has four hands, with the noose and spear in the two upper hands and the bow and arrows in the two lower hands. Manmatha, the God of Love has the same bow of sugarcane and the same arrows of flowers.

There are two things: rAga (attachment and liking); and dvesha (hate and dislike). The former gives rise to kAma (desire) and the latter gives rise to krodha (anger). Desire and anger have to be kept in control. Of course all these are born out of the great divine mAyic play of ambaaL. And by the same leelA of ambAL, they disappear by Her Grace (anugraha). The very thought that they will so disappear by Her Grace will help us fight against them.

'rAga-swarUpa-pAshADhyA' , meaning, She who holds the noose, which is 'rAga' in physical form -- is one of Her many names in the lalitA-sahasranAma. Similarly, another name is 'krodhA-karAnkushojjvalA', meaning, She who shines by the spear, which is 'krodha' in physical form.

Of the twin of Desire and Anger, desire has the form of ambaaL's noose (pAshaM). When you talk of 'yama-pAshaM' it is the noose. When you talk of mother's pAsham (tAip-pAshaM, in Tamil) it is her attachment and affection and therefore her concern, her desire (AshA). It is the desire that binds us. It binds us like a rope.

Anger has the form of ambaaL's spear. Anger pierces you like a spear. But it does not pierce the other man on whom you are angry. He may go away just like that, indifferently. Our anger pierces only ourselves. The pierce of the spear will be felt by us only. And we hurt ourselves. Modern science tells us how energy is wasted during anger and how much. What is more interesting is the further scientific fact – with which our scriptures agree – that whereas we exhibit anger (*krodhaM*) at something we don't like and thus waste energy, the energy loss is more while we like something, desire it and happily indulge in that desire (*kAmaM)*. In fact, Desire is the *hita-shatru* – enemy in the disguise of a friend.

The words *pAsham* and *ankusham* both ring a bell and bring the 'elephant' to our minds. The elephant is always tethered by a heavy chain to an anchor. The chain is actually a rope of attachment ('*pAshak-kayiru'*, in Tamil) for the elephant. The twins *kAma* and

krodha are elephant-like in their strength; so they have to be controlled with effort in the same way an elephant is controlled by a *pAsham* (rope) and *ankusham* (spear). The man who rides and monitors the elphant uses the spear to control it. The elephant-like evils of Desire and Anger are both in the mind. So it is the mind that has to be controlled. In fact in *Shiva*nandalahari (*shloka* 96) our Acharya compares the human mind to a '*madhepa*', meaning, a mad elephant.

Our ambaaL is always shown with a *pAsham* (noose) and *ankusham* (spear). This itself is Her *leelA*. They are Her important accessories. This is one way of looking at it.

Another way is this. She shows *pAsham* (affection, attachment) to us; so with the *pAsham* in her hand she binds us and pulls us away from all our worldly pAshams (attachments) and makes us come back to Her with the cry 'Oh Mother!'. And that gives us the attachment to the attachmentless Divine. *PatratrAn patru* (in the language of Valluvar, in Tamil)! Again, when we fall into the Anger mode, She brings her *ankusham* (spear) on us and subdues our anger, by that very ankusham which stands in her hand as the personification of Anger (*krodham*) ! When Desire is unfulfilled it turns into Anger. The same Desire and Anger, in Her hands, in the form of the noose and the spear, become the cure for the two evils in human minds.

Though our *shloka* in the Soundaryalahari mentions 'bow' and 'arrow' first and then mentions the 'noose' and 'spear', it is the 'noose and spear' that are special to ambAL. Manmatha the God of Love has the same bow and arrows both of which he uses to get mankind downward into sensuality. His bow draws man's mind into sensuousness and his five arrows affect the five organs of cognition.

But the same bow and five arrows in the hands of ambaaL work in a positive way as is vindicated by two names (that appear just immediately after the two names about rAga and krodha I mentioned a little while ago) in lalitA-sahasranAma, namely, *mano-rupekshhu-kodanDA* and *pancha-tanmAtra-sAyakA*.

The former means: '(She who has) the bow of sugarcane, the sugarcane being the figuration of the mind'. The latter name means: '(She who has) the five arrows that are the figurations of the five tanmAtras (= subtle principles behind the senses)'.

The same sugarcane bow, which in Manmatha's hands, draws man downward into sensuality, in Her hands, leads us upward by producing the 'desire' for *moksha*. The same five arrows of flowers, which in Manmatha's hands, lead man's five senses outward toward sense objects, in ambaal's hands, makes us desire, to see Her divine form, to hear the melody of music in devotion to Her, to taste the sweetness of the nectar flowing from Her Grace, to smell the fragrance of the flowers that adorned Her, and to feel the touch of Her lotus feet.

This whole *shloka* is a fit *shloka* for meditation. It reminds us that the bow and arrows that turned the Ishwara Himself – the Supreme who is nothing but a bundle of Knowledge, cit – into a creation-mode through the artifice of making Him fall in love

with Ishwari, who thereby became Shiva-kAma-sundari; that same bow and arrows now draw the medley of minds and senses of the *JIva*s and keep them under its control, thus protecting them (spiritually). In fact the bottom line is that even this action of 'drawing' and 'protecting' is not done by the bow and arrows but by just Her feet.

#4: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.17:

savithrIbhir-vAcAM shashi-maNi-shilA-bhanga-rucibhiH
vashinyAdyAbhis-tvAM saha janani samcintayati yaH /
sa kartA kAvyAnAm bhavati mahatAM bhangi-rucibhiH
vacobhir-vAg-devI-vadana-kamalA-moda-madhuraiH //

Tr. He who reflects on You, Oh Mother, along with the vashinI-devatAs who are the Generators of Speech who have the colour of the broken moonstone gem, he becomes the author of great poetic compositions through words (which have) the taste of art and wit (and which have) the sweet fragrance of the lotus face of vAg-devI (Sarasvati).

These eight *vAg-devatAs* constitute the Mothers of speech. That is why the *shloka* No.17 which prays for excellence in speech begins with '*savithrIbhir vAcAM'* . In traditional literature there is a gem known as '*chandrakAnta gem'* which is crystal-like and which will melt in moonlight. The *vAg-devatAs* have that kind of crystal colour in which moon reflects in a dazzling manner. In one *shloka* ambaal was depicted as pure white like the moonlight (*sharat-jyotsnA shuddhAm* - #15). In another She is *aruNA*, red (#16). In this *shloka* (#17) the aruNa, that is ambaal, is sitting surrounded by the *vAg-devatAs*, majestically like a Queen with all Her attendants. Whoever can meditate on this scene (*sancintayati yah*) gets the literary capacity and competence to compose great epic poems. In fact he gets the fluency and the power of speech which only great writers have.

And the *shloka* uses a specific word here: '*mahatAm bhangi rucibhiH'* . The word '*ruci*' means 'taste', or 'flavour'. 'Taste' certainly has an association with the tongue and the food which it 'tastes'. But the *shloka* adds on to this the 'flavour' by the nose also. The food 'taste' was indicated by the last line of *shloka* (#15) where it was said that the speech prompted by ambAL has the taste of 'honey, milk and grapes'. Now in this *shloka* that speech is likened to a profound flavour, not of any ordinary one, but of that which emanates from the lotus face of Her who is the single *vAgdevI* integrating all the eight *vAgdevIs*! Not only that. We can infer from this that it is not simply the speech that emanates through the poetry of the devotee has the divine flavour; the people who read and recite that poetry would also get that divine flavour.!!

The fact that ambaaL graces and bestows the faculty of speech is mentioned in the latter part of Soundaryalahari several times. *Shloka* #75 says that, fed by Her breast milk one is endowed with magnificient poetic capabilities. *Shloka* 99 says that the SArasvata-Grace that She endows makes even Brahma, the *pati* of Sarasvati, envious. The holy water that washes Her feet can make even the dumb to sing poems (*Shloka* 98). Obviously our Acharya takes pleasure in talking about this aspect of ambaaL's Grace. Maybe he wants us all to read and recite his stotras, thereby get the Grace of the Mother and also get the

vAk-siddhi (speech excellence) that She will certainly grant. That is why, it appears, he is never tired of repeating this.

The word '*shashi-maNi-shilA*' means 'moon-gem-stone' literally. Because of the fact that the dark patch on the moon appears like a rabbit ('*shasha*' in Sanskrit), the moon is known by the word '*shashi*'. The word 'hima-kara' also denotes the moon, meaning thereby that there flows icy water from the moon. So '*hima-kara-shilA*' also represents the same moonstone gem , known as '*chandrakAnta* stone' in Tamil. '*sudhA*' is nectar and '*sudhAkara*' is also the name of the moon, because it is also said that there flows nectar from it. Just as it was said that the attendants of ambaal have the colour of the moonstone (#17: *shashi-maNi-shilA*), it is said in *shloka* #20, that he who can meditate on ambaal Herself in the form made up of the moonstone (*hima-kara-shilA*), She who is the daughter of hima-giri (Himalayas) and is therefore '*hima-giri-sutA'*, will pour '*sudhA*' on him, '*sudhA*' meaning nectar and '*sutA*' meaning daughter. In fact it says more.

#5: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.22:

bhavAni tvam dAse mayi vitara dRShhTiM sakaruNAM
iti stotuM vAnchan kathayati bhavAni tvam-iti yaH /
tadaiva tvaM tasmai dishasi nija-sAyujya-padavIM
mukunda-brahmendra-sphuTa-makuTa-nIrAjita-padAM //

Tr. Oh Mother *bhavAni*. (*Bhava* is the name of Shiva. The *Shakti* of *Bhava* is *BhavAni.*)Please (you) cast (your) glance (which is) coupled with Grace and Compassion on me (who is your) servant. Wishing to praise thus, whoever says "*bhavAni tvaM*" ,then and there, (that is, even before you complete the remaining words "*dAse mayi vitara dRShhTiM sa karuNAM*")You grant or give to him your own *sAyujya* status (which earns them) Your feet that have been given the '*nIrAjana*' (waving of lights) by the Gods *Vishnu*, Brahma and Indra who, by falling at Your feet, have had their shining crowns touch your feet and thus have offered worship to it".

This *shloka* shows that even in the portion of Anandalahari, which is supposed to be mainly the esoteric content of the ShAkta scriptures, there are *shloka*s which reflect the pure *bhakti* sentiment coupled with excelling poetry. In this *shloka* one is lifted from the dvaita-*bhakti* to an advaita-like stage where there is a symbiosis of *bhakti*, *shakti* and jnAna.

The marvel here is, that the devotee has not yet said the full prayer of his, namely: Oh Bhavani, You please cast on me, your servant, your glance of compassion and grace. He has just said: "Oh Bhavani, You" ! That itself is sufficient for the Goddess to pour Her maximum Grace of Her own *sAyujya* status on the devotee. This is the implication of the words 'tadA-eva' in the beginning of the third line of the stanza. The very moment one says '*bhavAni tvaM*', he is granted the Grace. How is this? And what is this *sAyujya* status that is being granted?

To reach the world of the *ishhTa-devatA* (Chosen favourite deity) and live in that world is called *sAlokya-padavI*. The next stage is the *sAmIpya* stage. This is the stage where one

lives in the beatific presence of that God. The next stage which is *sArUpyam* is the process of becoming that very form by continuously meditating on the form. The ultimate is the *sAyujya-padavI* where one becomes in essence the object of one's adoration. This is an identity status, both in form and essence. It is that which becomes one with the Object of Adoration. But what is being said here is not the oneness with the *nirguNa-Brahman*. Why am I saying this?

If one reaches advaita-*sAyujya* (identity) with the Ultimate, things will not be like this; for there is no 'form' there and there are no feet to be worshipped! And then there will be no gods in name and form. The advaita *sAyujya*m is the oneness with the Ultimate *nirguna-Brahman* where there is no more universe. So what is said in this *shloka* is not the *sAyujya* of advaita.

It is the supreme *Brahman* which manifests itself as the First Cause in terms of *parAshakti*. She is the Queen of this Universe and She administers this whole universe by Her own agents such as Brahma and Indra. It is those divine agents who fall at Her feet in obeisance. It is in that state that the individual soul (jIvAtma) becomes one with the *parAshakti* in its *sAyujya* status. It is that *sAyujya* that is spoken of here.

Now we shall take up the pun on the words '*bhavAni tvaM*' in the *shloka*. As soon as the devotee utters the words '*bhavAni tvaM*' as a beginning for his full sentence: '*bhavAni tvaM dAse mayi vitara dRshhTim sakaruNAM'* the Goddess is ready to grant him the highly merited *sAyujya*m (identity) with Her. What is so powerful in those two words '*bhavAni tvaM*'? This is where the poet has played with Sanskrit grammar.

The word '*bhavAni*' can be interpreted in two ways – one as a noun, and another as a verb. The verbal root is '*bhava*'. This itself gives the two meanings. When '*bhava*' is a noun it is a name of Lord Shiva. In this context '*bhavAni*' would mean 'the consort of *bhava*', that is, ambaal. '*bhava*' as a verb would mean 'be' or 'become'. In this context, '*bhavAni*' would mean 'Let me become' or 'Let me be'. So '*bhavAni tvaM*' would mean 'May I become You'. Remember that in Sanskrit a sentence accommodates changing the order of the words in the sentence without affecting the meaning.

Ambaal is an ocean of compassion and grace. So when a devotee seeks the identity with Her by the two simple words '*bhavAni tvaM*', She doesn't wait for his further words; She simply grants the *sAyujya*-status 'then and there' ! But the irony of it is, he, the devotee, considers himself too low in the spiritual ladder to merit anything great and he has no conception of what honourable return from the Goddess awaits him. 'Just a glance towards this poor me, Oh Mother!' – this is all what he pleads for. Note that the poet uses the word '*yah*', meaning, 'whoever'. So the devotee does not have to be a great '*sAdhu*'. He could be any one. He may not even know that there is a status called '*sAyujya*m with ambaaL'! The couple of words '*bhavAni tvaM*' has such an effect even on ordinary persons who recite it.

#6: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.27:

japo jalpaH shilpaM sakalam-api mudrA-virachanA

gatiH prAdakshhiNya-kramaNam ashanAdy-Ahuti vidhiH /
praNAmaH samveshaH sukhaM akhilaM AtmArpaNa-dRshA
saparyA paryAyaH tava bhavatu yan-me vilasitaM //

Whatever actions we do everything must be in dedication to ambaa – this is the sum and substance of this *shloka*. Worship, japam, showing mudrAs by the fingers of the hand, circumambulation, prostration, offering in the fire with the chanting of *mantra*s in propitiation of ambaa – all these are usually done in honour of ambaa by Her devotees. Yes, all these have to be done. But the matter should not end there. Doing all this for a portion of the time, and then for the rest of the time getting fully immersed in material matters of the world, is exactly what should be avoided. It is not like 'A few hours for ambaa; and the rest of the time for me and my worldly activities'. All the time everything should become a worship, everything should be a japam, a homam and an offering. That is how we should change our life style. Not only the devotees, but all should be able to do this.

But how is this possible? Is this feasible? Don't I have to bathe? Don't I have to eat, sleep, mix with people, do my work in the world? I hear you are all raising these questions immediately. You may say that even the great so-called *jnAni*s (enlightened ones) are certainly doing all these routine activities of worldly life. So what is wrong?

Let it be. She as the Divine Mother has to perform Her leelA. That is alright. But how is it that the *jnAni*s, who know it is all Her leelA, are still working in the mundane world? You should also be like those *jnAni*s. Be in the world, not of the world. Maybe it is not possible just immediately. But gradually, you can train yourself to be so. Effort and constant practice are needed. For the present, start convincing yourself that your bathing, eating, talking, sleeping, walking, and all these ordinary activities are all happening because of Her *Shakti* – without which by yourself you cannot do a single thing. Constantly tell yourself that this is so. Slowly keep widening this belief for evcery action of yours.

When you recognize that you are eating because of the power She has given you to eat, you would not have the heart to send rubbish stuff into your stomach. When the belief settles in that it is ambaa that makes you walk, you will hesitate twice before wasting it on going to the races or the movies. When you know that it is by Her Grace you are talking, you would not waste it on gossiping or scolding another or discussing disgusting material. When we are aware of the fact that hands and feet are working because of Her, we would stop using them for doing wrong things.

Gradually, in due time, this conviction has to spread to your mental activities also. In other words, the egoistic thought of 'I am planning this or that' will give way to the thought 'Let Her get this done, if She wishes'. This change in the thought processes is important because it is through the mind all the mAyic changes and troubles of the world emerge. And they prevent the nullifying of the mind and the entry into *jnAna mArga*. Once we transfer the responsibilities to the Divine Mother, the impact of the mind will slowly disappear. Thereafter, whether She keeps us talking, walking or eating or She keeps us without any of these, in any case, we would be peaceful at the bottom of our

heart. It is to reach that state, to pray for that state to be possible, that this *shloka* has been given to us by the Acharya.

"*japo jalpaH*": '*jalpa*' means talk, whether it is meaningful or not. So all this talk should be a japam. In other words, it is the state of whatever we talk becoming an offering of japam for Her.

There are several *mantra*s like '*BalA*', '*ShhoDashI*', and '*panchadashI*'. All these *mantra*s are done in a japa form. We are not saying that they should not be done. But ultimately, the japa as a separate activity has to disappear and the conviction should occur that whatever we talk is a japa offering to Her.

"*sakalaM shilpam-api mudrA-virachanA*": Whatever I do by my hand, let it be a mudrA that one does in Your *pUjA*. Here '*shilpam*' must be taken to mean any kind of work. Unfortunately the tamil word '*shilpam*' means only sculpture. Maybe because Man produces forms just as the Creator creates human beings.

"*gatiH prAdakshhiNya-kramaNaM*" : Whatever movement I do let it be a circumambulation of You. Wherever I go let me have the feeling that I am doing a pradakshhiNA of You.

"*ashanAdi*" : food, etc. Since the 'etc.' is there it means not only food that is eaten, but food that is consumed by the other senses like eyes and ears. So all sensual experiences are covered.

"*Ahuti vidhiH*" : Let them be the offerings given to the sacred fire lit for You.

In fact all eating is done only after giving the first five morsels to the five prANas. In the *Gita* also, the Lord says that He it is who digests the food by being VaishvAnara as '*JATharAgni*' in the stomach. Once we have the conviction that it is He that is sitting inside and consuming what we send through the mouth, then we would not be sending in wine and meat for His consumption. The same logic applies to the sensual consumption by eyes, ears, skin, and nose. Everything is experienced by Him and so let us dare not send in undesirable things.

"praNAmas-samveshaH" : Let my very sleeping be a namaskara done to You. Once we realise that our lying down for rest is nothing but a namaskaram at the feet of ambaa, that would itself give us total peace and relaxation.

Why carry on this list in detail. It is not necessary to do special japa, homa, namakara and such rituals. Whatever we naturally do , let it be our pUja to You – this is the meaning of "*sukham akhilam AtmArpaNa-dRshA saparyA paryAyaH tava bhavatu yan me vilasitaM*". Here "*saparyA*" means *pUjA*. "*paryAya*" has many meanings, one of which is 'substitute'. So this gives the meaning: Let whatever I do be a 'substitute' for the *pUjA* to be done to You.

Note the words "*sukham-akhilaM-AtmArpaNa-dRshA*" in the third line of *shloka* 27.

"*sukham*" means 'without strain', 'naturally'. The word is very significant here. Since our mind is not in our control, it becomes a great strain to make it subscribe to a moralistic routine. But if we train our mind to think that everything is the work of ambaaL, the attempt to become moralistic slips into a natural frame wherein the goal is attained effortlessly. Because, when we have surrendered everything to Her, the mind starts doing what is natural to it, namely, it behaves like a pure mind. And that is the road to eternal happiness.

The words "*AtmArpaNa-dRshA*" is the life-line of this *shloka*; not only of this *shloka*, but of all Hindu scriptures. This is the *Atma-nivedanaM*, the last of the nine-fold *bhakti* methodologies enunciated in the BhA.. It is also the complete Surrender described in all Bhakti literature and particularly in the B.G.. The expression literally means: "By the attitude which is ready to lay one's life at Her feet". Only when that attitude is present, all talk becomes a japa, all action becomes a mudrA, and so on for the rest. Let things become like this through the attitude of "*Atma-samarpaNaM*" (laying one's life at the feet). The word "*bhavatu*" in the last line stands for this plea. A person who can do this surrender, would have his whole life sanctified as a *pUjA* to Her Almighty.

An exactly analogous thought almost in the same words has been given in "*Shiva-mAnasa-pUjA"* by the Acharya himself.

AtmA tvaM girijA matiH sahacarAH prANAH sharIraM gRhaM
pUjA te vishhayopa-bhoga-racanA nidrA samAdhi sthitiH /
sancAraH padayoH pradakshhiNa-vidhiH stotrANi sarvA giro
yad-yat karma karomi tat-tad-akhilaM shambho tavA-RadhanaM //

You Lord Shiva are my AtmA; my mind is ambikA, the daughter of the Mountain; my five prANas are the *GaNas* that serve you; my body is your temple; all my involvement in sensual experience is your *pUjA*; my sleep is the samAdhi state; my wanderings on my feet constitute Your *pradakshhiNa*; whatever I talk shall be your praises; whatever I do O shambho, all that shall be a propitiation of You.

Such a dedication of everything at the feet of the Lord is what is prescribed by the Lord in the *Gita* (9 – 27):

Yat-karoshhi yad-ashnAsi yaj-juhoshhi dadAsi yat / Yat-tapasyasi
kaunteya tat-kurushhva mad-arpaNaM //

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in the homa-fire, whatever you give away, whatever intense concentration you do – all that should be offered to Me.

"There is nothing that I do" "Good or bad, Am I the doer?" – Such expressions of total surrender are everywhere in the works of Nayanmars, Alvars and also the saints of other religions. It is this kind of total surrender that gives the destination of one's birth, namely, *JIva*n-mukti.

What is talked of as 'the cessation of mind' in the path of jnAna becomes the 'total surrender' in the path of *bhakti*. Both are "*AtmArpaNaM*" only. Both have the same result, namely, *jIvan-mukti* – Release (even) while alive!

To sum up, the body does what it does because it is being made to do so by the *JIva* within it; so also what all this *JIva* does is because it is being made to do so by a Supreme *JIva-Shakti* behind it and that is the Mother Goddess. For that *Shakti*, not only this Jiva is the body but all the *JIva*s – nay, in fact the entire Universe is the body. So whatever happens in the Universe is because of Her. Once this idea settles deeply in our minds then there will be no problem of 'laying our lives at Her feet' (*Atma-samarpaNaM*).

#7: Soundaryalahari Shloka No.44:

tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-laharI
parIvAha-srotaH saraNiriva sImanta-saraNiH /
vahantI sindUraM prabala-kabarI-bhAra-timira-
dvishhAM bRndaiH bandhIkRtam-iva navInArka-kiraNaM //

This *shloka* has an added significance since it has contributed to the title of the stotra '*soundarya-laharI'*.
"*naH kshhemaM tanotu*" : Let there devolve auspiciousness on all of us. Thus begins the *shloka* auspiciously. What is supposed to devolve the auspiciousness?
"*sImanta-saraNiH*" : The line of the parting of hair (on the head). '*SImanta*' is the parting of hair. '*saraNiH*' means path, route, line, wave, flow. The particular meaning will depend on the context. Here it is 'line'. The word '*SImanta-unnayanaM'* denotes a special ritual that is done for pregnant women for the benefit of the foetus. The ritual consists of drawing a line along the *sImantaM* of the woman with the chanting of certain *mantra*s. This is good for the foetus. The word sImantaM is a union of '*sImA*' and '*antaM*'. *SImA* means boundary, here, the boundary that parts the two sides of the hair. Its '*antam*' is the end of that boundary. Technically it should have been '*sImAntaM*' but the middle long '*a*' has been shortened. This is actually an exception to the usual grammatical rule. A similar exception, but in the opposite direction, takes place in the name '*VishvAmitra*' where it should have been only '*Vishvamitra*', thus meaning, friend of the world. On the other hand as '*VishvAmitra*' ('*Vishva' + 'amitra'*) it now means 'the enemy of the world'. Again this is an unusual grammatical exception.

So '*SImantaM'* means 'the end of the boundary or border'. Of what is it the border or boundary? For a human body there are two boundaries. One is the foot and the other is the head. In the boundary that is the head, the line of parting of the hair goes up to the position of '*brahmarandra*' and ends there. So it is called 'the end of the boundary' or '*sImantaM*'.
Goddess Mahalakshmi permanently resides in five places. A lotus, the frontal lobe of an elephant, the hind part of a cow, the spine on the back of a bilwa leaf, and the *sImantaM* of a *sumangali.*

It is interesting to note that the Acharya has used "*vadana-soundarya-laharI'* (waves of beauty of the face) in this *shloka* and this has become the title of the whole stotra. We do

not know who made it the title, but what we may conclude is that it is quite apt. What is further interesting is the fact that this beauty-wave occurs in the *shloka* where the sImanta of the Devi is talked about. It is this flood of facial beauty that should bring us the auspiciousness that we need. '*tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-laharI*'.

Now let us find out what is so special about the *sImanta* here. "*vahantI sindUraM*" : It (the *sImantaM* : the parting in the hair) bears the vermilion. The word '*sindUraM*' also means 'red lead' which is used for medicinal purposes in Siddha medicine. In North India almost all Ganesha deities would be totally soaked in this *sindUraM*. And in the same way they would do it for the Anjaneya deity also. Maybe the indication is that the beginning and the end are the same!

In traditional books, *kumkumaM* is spoken of as *sindUraM*. The *Veda-mAtA* (Mother Goddess representing Shruti) bows down in obeisance to ambaa. It is the *kumkumaM* from the sImantam of Veda-mAtA that has sprinkled itself on the feet of ambaa. This idea occurs in LalitA-sahasranAma. '*SImanta-sindUri*' is the expression there. It is in the parting of the hair that *kumkumaM* is applied. On the forehead however, that is, between the eyebrows where one applies the '*tilakam*' what is applied is '*kastUri-tilakam*' -- this is what one gathers from the sahasranAma. Recall the name: "*mukha-chandra-kaLankAbha-mRga-nAbhi-visheshhakA*". It says, just as there is a spot (*kaLanka*) on the disc of the moon, so also is the *kastUri*-dot on the face of ambaa. This name occurs (in the *sahasranAma*) between the name that describes the forehead (*aLika-sthala*) and the name that describes the eyebrows (*cillikA*). Therefore it is clear that the name '*mukha-chandra- kaLankAbha- ...*' describes the centre of the eyebrows. So *kumkumaM* at the parting of the hair (*SImanta-sindUri*) as well as the *kumkumaM* at the centre of the eyebrows – both are called '*sindUraM*' by the Acharya.

According to the *shAstras*, the place where sumangalis (women with living husbands) have to adorn the *kumkumaM* is the parting of the hair, at the place where it starts from the forehead. The practice of adorning the centre of the eyebrows is only a cosmetic addition. It is at the centre of the eyebrows where one concentrates the Supreme. It is in that manner one wears the *vibhUti* or sandal-paste, etc. at that spot; so also *kumkumaM* is also applied there. Whatever it be, the characteristic of a sumangali is only the *kumkumaM* at the parting of the hair. Women of olden days applied the *kumkumaM* first at the parting of the hair and then only on the forehead between the eyebrows.

The location of the central parting of the hair is a kind of residential address of the Goddess Bhagya-lakshmi of Prosperity. Goddess ambaa has the *kumkumaM* along the entire parting of the hair. That is what this *shloka* says. '*SImanta-saraNI'* means only that. In fact as the *shloka* goes, it appears that there is a round spot of *kumkumaM* at the point where this '*saraNI*' (the path) starts at the top of the forehead and thereafter along the path of the parting, it goes as a streak of red. There is no greater bliss than the pleasure of visualising ambaa with this SImanta-sindhuram. In other words the place of residence of mahAlakshmi has been decorated with *kumkumaM*. In fact there is much more in this.

In the Assembly of ambaa, on both sides of Her, Lakshmi and Saraswati are said to be fanning Her. This is what the name "*sa-cAmara-ramA-vANI-savya-dakshhiNa-sevitA*" says in the Lalita-sahasranAma. Instead of having them as Her assistants, She has them both as Her very eyes – this is what the name "*kAmAkshhi*" means. "*kA*" means Saraswati and "*mA*" means Lakshmi. And "*akshha*" means 'eye'. So "*kAmAkshhi*" is the One who has '*kA*' and '*mA*' as Her eyes!

Later, *shloka* 64 says that Saraswati dwells in Her tongue. In fact, the grace of ambaa in bestowing power of expression to devotees is well known. That is why Saraswati is spoken of as dwelling in Her own tongue. And the poet in the Acharya plays gymnastics with the word japa in that *shloka*, where it says: Your tongue defies the japa (hibiscus) flowers in its redness because it is constantly engaged in the Japa (*mantra*-repetition) that gives expression to the glories of Lord Shiva; the redness of Her tongue is so intense that the Goddess of Speech, Saraswati, who dwells therein, gets Her crystal-like white complexion changed into the colour of a ruby (noted for its reddishness). We already saw in *Shloka* 16 that poets have spoken of Her as '*shRngAra-laharI*' in Her form as the 'red' Saraswati (*aruNa-saraswati*).

Thus, of the two fanning divines, one of them, Saraswati, is elevated to the position of residing in the divine tongue of ambaa. So, the other of them, namely Lakshmi, is now elevated in this *shloka* (#44), to even a higher position, namely, the top of the divine head itself. Lakshmi resides in the *sImanta* of ambaa; and it is that Lakshmi who is decorated with the kumkuma-ornamentation of redness.

So the parting of the hair goes like a white streak amidst the jet black forest of hair ('*cikura-nikurumbaM'* of *shloka* 43) which looks like waves of blue-black on either side of it. It is the whiteness of the sImanta (parting line) that is usual; but here ambaa's *sImantaM* has been made reddish by the *sindUraM*. So the blackness of the locks of hair on either side and the redness of the parting line make the imagination of the poet run riot. Many of us do not appreciate such poetic licence, because of our preoccupation with the utilitarian value of everything we see or experience. But a poet does not just see beauty; he invents original analogies and that is what makes us enjoy both the poetry and the devotional sentiment built into it.

'*prabala-kabarI-bhAra-timira-dvishhAM bRndair-bandhIkRtaM iva navInArka-kiraNaM'* -- these are the words.

'*arka*' is the Sun. '*arka-kiraNaM*' means the Sun's ray. '*navIna*' is new. So '*navIna-arka-kiraNaM'* means the rays of the rising Sun. Certainly it is reddish. Only when the Sun comes up higher and higher it loses its redness of appearance and becomes pure white. But at the point of rising it is red. The Acharya sees the *sImanta-sindUraM* on the divine head as one of the red rays of the rising Sun. At the beginning of the parting, namely at the top of the forehead, the *sindUraM* is a big dot (red) and so is the Sun itself (rising) and the *saraNi*, namely the line of parting, is the red ray emanating from that Sun.

'*prabala-kabarI-bhAra-timira-dvishhAM bRndair-bandhIkRtaM'*. Does this not sound like a cluttering chatter of teeth? Why this hard construction ? The very words speak of a thunderous noise of battle. Who is battling with whom? The talk is about the *sImanta-saraNi*. Then who is warring with it?

'*kabarI-bhAra-timiraM'* means the darkness shown by the jet black dense hair. The adjective '*prabala*' prefixed to it, indicates a further strength to that darkness. When something is 'strong' it can be expected to be aggressive also, in the worldly ways of thinking. So whom will this darkness challenge or contest? Only Light. What is opposed to darkness is light. It is the sun which dispels the darkness of the night and brings the day. It is not even just the sun; it is the morning sun that night considers as the harbinger of its doom. Because darkness never 'sees' the full Sun. As soon as the first ray of the morning sun appears, darkness has to wind up and run.

And here, while darkness is in the form of ambaa's hair, the morning sun has appeared in the form of the *sindUraM* on the top of the forehead. It is the crimson ray of the morning sun that is represented by the *sindUraM*-coloured parting of the hair. And it is this parting that prevents the darkness on either side to become one large mass of darkness. Further, it is the darkness of the hair that has been pampered by oil, shampoo, and flowers – as has been indicated by the words '*ghana-snigdha-shlakshhNaM*' (luxuriant, soft and oily) in *shloka* #43. Because it has been 'pampered' it has become '*prabala*' (exceedingly strong) now. And that gives it the courage to dare challenge the redness of the sImantaM!

Darkness of night is the dominating factor all night. But the moment the rising sun with its crimson rays shows up, darkness has to flee. It has always been the unfulfilled ambition of 'darkness' to settle this score with the young sun. And here is ambaa having all the world's darkness, as it were, collected in her hair. But She has also brought the young sun in the form of the *sindUra*-spot right in the midst of this dark forest of hair. It is a life-time opportunity for darkness. With gusto it swallows all the rays emanating from that sun, for once. But still there is one single ray of crimson which goes straight across the centre of all this dark hair. It is that crimson which gives a decorating hue to the black hair. And it is the jet black background which brings out the majesty of the crimson parting of hair.

Thus we can see darkness having vanquished all but one ray of the bright rising sun. Why did it not go all the way by its challenge and overpower that one remaining ray also? But for that single ray remaining in its place, how would it be established that darkness had vanquished the bright sun and its rays? It is the one remaining ray of the sun that tells us that the other rays have been vanquished.

"*dvishhAM bRndaiH*" means 'by the gangs of enemies'. It is from the root '*dvishh*' that the word '*dveshha*', meaning 'hate' is derived. "*bRndaM*" means a crowd, a gang. The crowd of hair on ambaa's head flows wave after wave and so looks like armies of black ready for fight. "*bandIkRtam-iva*" means 'as if imprisoned'. It is the rising sun in the form of the *sImanta-sindUraM* that is imprisoned here by the armies of black hair.The

word "*bandIkRtaM*" is significant. Not only have all the crimson rays of the rising sun been vanquished, but even that one remaining ray has been imprisoned by the dark army surrounding it on either side so densely that it cannot move this way or that way!

Incidentally, if one wants divine presence, the parting of the hair has to be straight in the centre – not this side or that side – of the hair on the head. And the *sindUraM* has to come from pure turmeric, not from any other artificial source.

Among the many meanings of "*bandhaM*" one is 'imprisonment'. The meaning of "*bandIkRtaM*" is 'be imprisoned'. The difference is between the active and the passive. So here '*bandIkRtaM iva*' means 'as if imprisoned'.

Well, what has all this – fight between darkness and light -- to do in the devotional stotra "*soundarya-laharI*"? In *shloka* 43, it was said that Her black braid of luxuriant locks of hair itself will eradicate the dense darkness of ignorance in us. In the same way he says in this *shloka* that the *sImantaM* (parting of hair) which in a sense has been imprisoned by the black forest of hair on either side, will grace us with all prosperity. In fact the sImantam is the residence of Lakshmi the Goddess of Prosperity. Its 'imprisonment' is only an imagination; '*bandIkRtam-iva*' – as if imprisoned – is the word. Now we shall see the other side of this sImantaM. We shall indeed see its greatness. I began with what appeared to be its negative side because I wanted to end up this *shloka* with the positive side. The Acharya of course begins this *shloka* only with the positive.

Now look at the first two lines:
tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-laharI
parIvAha-srotaH saraNiH iva sImanta-saraNiH /

Great poets do not waste their words. So when our Acharya uses '*laharI*', '*parIvAhaM*', '*srotas*' and '*saraNI*', which all convey more or less the same meaning 'flood', there should be something deeper in it. Yes, there is a deeper point. There are shades of differences in the meaning. '*laharI*' is the bubbling, wavy and noisy water-flow. '*parIvAhaM*' is the real flood of water which simply marches forward. '*srotas*' could even be a silent rivulet. '*saraNI*' is a straight flow of water, like that in an artificial canal. What starts as a '*laharI*' , widens up into a '*parIvAhaM*' and then flows like a controlled river '*srotas*' between two banks and finally is channelised into a canal '*saraNI*'.

This is how ambaaL's beauty starts from Her face as a laharI and spreads like a pravAha. When it touches the top of the forehead it becomes a srotas. The banks on either side of this srotas is the hair on either side of the *sImantaM*. Actually the flood of beauty cannot be dammed by the forest of hair. What is the greatness of ambaaL's beauty if one can dam it by holding it between two banks? '*vaktra-lakshmI-parIvAhaM*' (the flood of beautiful brilliance) says *lalitA-sahasranAmaM*. The brilliance starts from the face and overflows as a flood into the locks of hair on the head but is contained in the form of a '*saraNi*' – *sImanta-saraNi* – between the dense forest of hair on either side. It is this brilliance (*lAvaNya*) of the Mother Goddess that bestows prosperity and happiness to all Her devotees. And since it all starts from the face, he calls it '*vadana-soundarya-laharI'*.

And legitimately, the whole work has been named – we do not know by whom – *Soundarya-laharI*.

This *shloka* 'tanotu kshhemaM naH' properly meditated on, will bring us divine help in controlling our mind and all its evil tendencies – '*dvishhAm bRndaiH'* – by which we are all imprisoned – '*bandIkRtaM*'.

#8. Soundaryalahari Shloka No.97

girAm Ahur-devIM druhiNa-gRhiNIM Agamavido
hareH patnIM padmAM hara-saha-carIM adri-tanayAM /
turIyA kApi tvaM duradhigama-nissIma-mahimA
mahAmAyA vishvaM bhramayasi para-brahma-mahishhI //

Tr. Those who know the scriptures declare (You) as the Goddess of Speech, the wife of Brahma the Creator (as well) as Lakshmi, the wife of Lord *Vishnu* (and as well) as Parvati, the daughter of Mountain-King, the Consort of Lord Shiva. (But) You, (on the other hand), are the fourth (higher than the other three), not to be delimited as This or That, of unique glory that is both unfathomable and limitless, (in fact) the Queen-Consort of the Absolute *Brahman* (being) the great Cosmic *mAyA* revolving and compering the entire universe.

The distinctive keyword in this *shloka* (#97) is the unusual expression "*para-brahma-mahishhI*". All along, the Soundaryalahari has been saying that the parA-*shakti* is the highest with sovereign power. In order to show to the world their Father and Mother, that *Shakti* brought in a *KAmeshvara* and gave him the status of a husband to Her. That was our understanding. Here the words "Queen-Consort of the Absolute *Brahman*" have significant connotations. It means that the para-*Brahman* is the sovereign and *ambaa*l is next to him, as his wife. The word "*mahishhI*" means Queen-Consort. One who herself rules is not called a "*mahishhI*"; she would be called "*mahA-rAjnI*" or "*cakra-vartinI*". '*rAjA*' and '*rAjnI*' have the same connotations, except one is male and the other is female. So also '*chakravarti*' and '*cakravartinI'*. But there is no pair of words '*mahishha*' and '*mahishhI*'; the King is not called '*mahishha*'. Actually '*mahishha*' is an asura who was in the form of a buffalo! '*Mahishhi*' is a unique word used for the Queen-consort, the second in command, of a King. Corresponding to that meaning of '*mahishhI'* there is no male word 'mahishha'!

The *stotra* began with saying that it is She who makes Him move. And at several places we have been told that it is She who is the Agent-Provocateur for every action in the world. She is the One who takes care of Him even at the time of dissolution. After all this, when he comes to the end of the *stotra* the Acharya winds up with Her as the dutiful *'patni'* of Him who is the all-in-all. In fact She Herself would like it only this way. Is She not the One who is writing all this poetry through the pen of the Acharya?

Now let us go to the rest of the *shloka*. Though the last word is "*para-brahma-mahishhI*", earlier he mentions Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati – the Consorts of the Trinity of Divines –and then only brings in the *ParAshakti* that is *KAmeshvari*, the 'consort' of the *turIyaM* that is *Brahman.* Just in the previous *shloka* (#96), he had said: "There are those

who have courted and attained Sarasvati though She is the wife of Brahma. There are all the rich who are called '*ShrimAn*', because Shri, that is Lakshmi, resides with them, though She belongs to Lord *Vishnu*. But nobody can fault You as having deserted your husband. Therefore You are the greatest in chastity!" There is an implied let-down here of Sarasvati and Lakshmi. The Acharya clears himself of this let-down, in the present *shloka* #97. The Teacher of advaita that he is, he cannot afford to make distinctions between deities. He is the one who gave all importance to the name of Sarasvati, by creating *ShAradA Pitham* and Sringeri where all the worship is for *ShAradambAl*. The dasha-nAmi classification of renunciates has two of the categories named as '*Sarasvati'* and '*BhArati'*; note that no other deity gets into the names of the dashanAmi's. In the same way, he was the one who composed the famous '*kanaka-dhAra-stavaM'* on Lakshmi. In fact it was his first composition!

So the very first thought of the *shloka* is to clear any distinction between deities. It is to *ambaa* he says "You are the One who is known as Sarasvati the Goddess of Speech, and You are the One who is also known as Mother Lakshmi". This is not a casual statement from him, says he. The knowers of the Vedas themselves say so ("*AgamavidaH AhuH*"), he adds humbly. And then it is You who is also Parvati, the wife of Rudra. All are parA*shakti*. And this is nothing but advaita. And this advaita prompts him to mention the turIyam, the Fourth.

According to *ShAkta* philosophy and also according to Shaivam, there are Divinities for the Five Cosmic Functions. The Absolute Truth is beyond. Not like this in advaita. Vedic authentication of advaita comes from Ma.U. The dream state of every *jIva* is Creation, the waking state is *Sthiti* (Sustenation) and the sleeping state is Dissolution; and that which is still awake even in that sleep state is the Fourth, that is *Brahman*. In the same strain, in this *shloka*, the Acharya goes to the '*turIyaM*' after mentioning the three *shakti*s of the Trinity; he does not go to the other two of the cosmic functions.

The '*Shakti* of *Brahman*' is not specially talked about by him in advaita. Nor can we say it is never talked about. Right in the commentary of the very first *sUtra*, in *Brahma-sutra-bhAshhya*, The Acharya, detailing the '*lakshaNa*' of *Brahman* in the words "*nitya-shuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhAvaM*" , he adds "*sarvajnaM*"; by this addition it is therefore accepted that this 'One' (*ekaM*) also admits of '*sarvaM*' (a multiplicity) and all that is 'known' by This. Later, more explicitly, he adds another *lakshaNa*: "*sarva-shakti-samanvitaM"* (possessing all powers). Further in the commentary on II-1-30, "*sarvopetA ca tad-darshanAt*", the duality status is recognised and he says *Brahman* has a varied *shakti-yoga*. Here '*shakti-yoga'* means that which coeexists with *shakti*. This is what becomes the "*para-brahma-mahishhI*" in the language of *ShAktaM*, as in this *shloka* of Soundaryalahari.

One direct disciple of the Acharya was Sarvajn*Atman*. He was the last disciple. He is one of the leading exponents of advaita. Listen to him in '*Samkshhepa-ShArIrakaM*' III-228, 229. "In *Shuddha-advaita* there is nothing like *Shakti*, *leelaa* or creation. However, even for those with such faith, there is a place for *karma* and *upAsanA*. Seen from that *vyavahAra* perspective, the *cit* (*Brahman*, Consciousness) takes a role of *shakti* and with

its inert *mAya-avidyA* power, creates the universe". Yet, in the advaita works of the Acharya the aim is not to direct attention to this dance of *Shakti*. Without giving any importance to Brahma-*shakti*, he always discards creation as the work of *mAyA* and calls on us to think of the *turiya-Brahman* beyond. Mostly he does not even refer to the *shakti* or energy that is beyond a gender specification. When that is so, what to talk of Her as the '*patni*' of *Brahman*!

But the same Acharya, the teacher of *brahma-vidyA*, now talks as the teacher of Shri Vidya and shows the way to those who have a taste in this direction. And the way is *KAmeshvari*, the '*para-brahma-mahishhI'*. The *Shri Vidya tantra* also has the same aim as advaita-*sAyujyaM*. Thus he combines the turIya at the goal of the *jnAna* path of advaita and the Shiva-*Shakti* concept in the Bhakti path.

Incidentally when he says '*turIyA*' in the feminine, not only does that mean the parA*shakti* beyond the three of Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, it also means that '*turIyA*' is the patni of the '*turIyaM*' that is *Brahman*.

Notice that there is a unification of advaita Vedanta with *ShAkta*m here. The parA*shakti* of the *ShAkta* philosophy is identified with the *mAyA* of advaita Vedanta. When it is spoken of as '*duradhigama-nissIma-mahimA'* (of unfathomable and boundless glory) the language is of *ShAkta*m. For in advaita *mAyA* is considered to be '*tuchhaM'* and therefore to be discarded as an incomprehensible anirvacanIyaM. But here it is the glorious *parAshakti*!

Our Acharya is matchless when it comes to his role as a spiritual teacher. In Soundaryalahari he has talked both advaita and *Shri Vidya* and has made a beautiful symbiosis of the two philosophies so as to be palatable, enjoyable and adaptible to both the Vedantins and the *Shri Vidya* followers. And this has been possible because, as I have told you in the beginning, Shri Vidya is nearest to advaita, among all schools of thought.

In the beginning he talked about the capability of *Shakti* making the first prompting that makes Him move. And now at the end he makes the same *Shakti* as the prime mover of everything in the universe: "*vishvam bhramayasi*". Naturally this compering and revolving includes all the motion of the universe. Krishna in the *Gita* talked only of the movement of the living when He said: "*bhRamayan sarva-bhUtAni*". By that He meant only the movement of the minds of living beings. But here the Acharya has included the movement of not only the living (*cetana*) but also of the non-living (*acetana*), by the use of the word "*vishvaM*".

This *mAyA* or *parAShakti* that makes both the living and the non-living dance to Her tunes, is the same one who as Mother Goddess graces all of us not only with everything mundane but finally the very Bliss of *Brahman* (" *parAnanda-rasaM*"). This is the content of *Shloka* 99.

4. A Garland of other selections

Devotional hymns have generally three facets:

Glorification of the supra-natural and supra-mental.
Worship of the Transcendental Divine both in its impersonal and personal forms.
Prayer to the Almighty to grant us this or that.

There are thousands of devotional hymns in the vast archives of Hindu scriptural literature. Each one has a spiritual, mystic and or occult sanctity given to it by the original seer who visualised it by his devotional meditative insight. Each one has also perhaps a mythological context in which it got the super-natural powers ascribed to it or claimed by it. Presented below is a purely personal collection (a very very small collection) of 18 extracts from various such hymns, generally in the Sanskrit language , unless specified otherwise. Each extract may be just one verse from a well-known hymn but the particular verse is cited here because of its (experienced) value for daily recitation or meditation. This collection (in addition to the NarayaneeyaM and Soundaryalahari collections already elaborated in the previous sections), is totally a personal choice of this author from his own experience and needs to be taken as such, along with its limitations, omissions and commissions. At worst it may be taken as a sample of possible such collections. But all of these can be used as a spring-board to float flights of spiritual imagination, which can give us enough food for a useful *nididhyAsana*. The elaboration of #1 below is an example.

#1. Sri VaidyanAthAShTakam Shloka No.6:

Vedanta-vedyAya jagan-mayAya
yogISvara-dhyeya-padAmbhujAya /
trimUrti-rUpAya sahasra-nAmne
shri vaidyanAthAya namah ShivAya //

Tr. Prostrations to Lord Shiva (known as) Shri Vaidya-nAtha, the Lord of all doctors and doctoring, -- (who is) (known by) thousands of names and of several triads of forms, whose Lotus Feet constitute the object of meditation by yogic saints, who pervades or manifests as the perceptible universe; and who is the (only) One to be known from all VedAnta.

The significance of this *shloka* starts from the observation that this is an only Vedantic *shloka* in an 8-*shloka* prayer, which is otherwise, a very common type of prayer, particularly oriented towards the God who cures all diseases.

This innocent-looking verse of 44 syllables contains a mine of Vedantic import. First of all the 'namaH shivAya' *mantra* one of the foremost *mantra*s of Hindu religion and philosophy, is imbedded in it. If we put aside also the personal name 'VaidyanAthaya' **the other five (impersonal) epithets that govern the name of the Absolute indicate the only five ultimates to which everything may be reduced, namely, *sat, cit, Ananda, and nAma and rUpa*, as a penultimate step to the final reduction to The advaitic One and Only One.** In fact, if one keeps meditating on this *shloka* one can run through

several concepts of advaita, including the concept of *mAyA*. We shall take these one by one below. We are going by the style of Shankara's advice in LaghuvAkyavRtti (#17) – repeated by Vidyaranya in his PanchadashI (XIII – 83): "Thinking of that; Talking of that; Mutually reminding one another of the same thing; Being involved only in that – This is known as the practice of the subject of *Brahman*. (BrahmAbhyAsaM). So say the Wise":

tac-cintanaM tat-kathanaM anyonyaM tat-prabodhanaM.
Etad-eka-paratvaM ca brahma-abhyAsaM vidur-budhAH.

TRANSCENDENCE

He transcends everything. He can be known only through the declaration of the Vedas. And they declare '*ahaM brahma asmi'*. It is finally the 'I' that transcends everything. That transcendent entity is the essential common content of That as well as This. Any attempt to know It has to be done only through the teaching of Vedanta and the spiritual message of the *Guru*. It is the Ultimate Knowledge that Vedanta directs you to. The *Gita*charya makes this astounding declaration in no uncertain terms: "That which is known by all the Vedas (and by all forms of knowing) am I. I am indeed the knower of Veda and the maker of Vedanta":

vedaishca sarvair-ahameva vedyo VedantakRd-veda-vid-eva cAhaM (XV – 15).

Therefore *Vedanta-vedyAya*. It is something different from virtue and vice, it is different from cause and effect and also different from the past and the future :

anyatra dharmAt anyatra adharmAt, anyatra kRtAkRtAt,
anyatra bhUtAt, anyatra bhavyAt. (K.U.: I –ii – 14)

But does it mean then that there is nothing else to be known? What about this visible universe which impacts on us in thousand-and-one ways? In any knowledge of things, we cannot ignore this perceptibility of this universe. Is that not so? The answer is: No. The perceptibility of the universe is only a transitory phenomenon. Its transitoriness is exactly what makes it less real than the substratum of *Brahman* on which it is superimposed. This is where we go to the next epithet: *jagan-mayAya*.

But before we do that, note that the concept of transcendence is the *vyApakatvaM* that the Upanishads are never tired of speaking whenever they refer to the Absolute. Of the two processes by which we have to convince ourselves about the concept of the Absolute, this is the *vyatireka* process, meaning, the aloofness of the Effect from the Cause.

Incidentally this is the '*sat*' aspect of the five fundamentals mentioned earlier. The next one is the '*cit*' aspect.

IMMANENCE

jagan-mayAya: The universe is full of Him. It is He that shows Himself as the universe. So learn to see Him in the universe. *'yo mAm pashyati sarvatra'* (He who sees Me everywhere and in everything …) says the Lord (VI – 30). He who sees only the elephant in the wooden elephant (Recall the classic quote in Tamil of Tirumoolar) is only a child in the spiritual plane. The world appears; but it only appears. The elephant appears in the wooden structure; but if you look carefully and take off the elephant appearance from the wood, slowly, gradually, steadily and concentratedly, you will only see the wood. The wood is not now seen 'behind' the elephant, not seen as the 'substratum' but seen as the only substance that is there. It requires conviction and concentration to get the view of the wood to the exclusion of 'the elephant'. This is what every advaitic seer wants us to see. And they say: '*yaH pashyati sa pashyati*'. He who sees (thus), sees!

To see this, at least intellectually, the Kapilopakhyanam of Srimad BhA. (See the Section on Kapila *Gita* in Chapter 7) gives a telling example. The reflection of light on a wall from a pool of water or a glass, takes our attention to the source of the reflection, namely, to the pool or the glass. But that source itself has an original source, namely the sun in the sky. In the same way the consciousness of the I-sense that we all have must first be traced to the source,the *JIva*. But that again is not the final source. The ultimate source is the Bundle of Consciousness, that is *Brahman*.

aqaThis is the immanence that the Vedas repeatedly emphasize. What is emphasized is that what we see is not a transformation of *Brahman* like what was milk earlier is now the curd that we see and taste. The universe is not the result of a '*pariNAma*' of *Brahman*. *Brahman* never undergoes any change. It is *Brahman* itself that is appearing as the universe; the rope appearing as the snake.

The immanence is the *antaryAmitvaM* that the Upanishads speak of very often. Of the two processes by which we have to convince ourselves about the Absolute, this is the *anvaya* process, meaning, the continuity of the Cause in the Effect.

Brahman appears as the Universe. *Brahman* also appears as *JIva*. In both cases the reality of the substratum gives an apparent reality to what is superimposed on it. But the two appearances, when the Ignorance vanishes, do not vanish the same way. When Ignorance vanishes, what appeared as the Universe is now known to have been *Brahman* only. So the Realisation comes that the Universe was only an appearance. On the other hand, when the *JIva* realises its *Brahman*-hood, the Jiva appearance does not vanish; the Jiva still remains but now remains as *Brahman*.

Well, it all seems to be too academic. How do we really 'experience' it? Only by resorting to the Lord for guidance. And so we go to the next epithet: '*yogishvara-dhyeya-padAmbhujAya*'.

VEDANTIC MEDITATION

Throughout the vast literature of Vedanta, resort to the Lord's help is a sine qua non. Without the Lord's Grace Ultimate mokshha is not going to happen. It is not the Effort of

Man but the Grace of the Almighty that brings mokshha. His Lotus Feet has to be meditated on and nididhyAsana done with His Grace will open the Gates of Realisation. The 'Gate of Realisation' is only another way of saying 'Ignorance has ended'. Ignorance whose origin is shrouded in mystery – and will ever remain so, in spite of all our erudition, scholarship and logic – has a definite end. That is the end to which we are all striving. The sure way to strive is to hold on to the *padAmbhuja* (Lotus feet) of the Lord. '*mAm-ekaM-sharaNaM vraja'* says the Lord as the final message of the *Gita*.

This is the Ananda aspect because Meditation itself is Bliss.

The joining together of the two extremities – the Feet of the Divine with the head of the devotee – is what is esoterically symbolised by the joining of the palms in the traditional Hindu way of worship. The right palm denotes the feet of the Divine and the left palm denotes the head of the devotee. Succession of poets over the centuries have not only sung the greatness of the Divine Feet, but have sung greater glories of the dust under the Divine Feet (cf. Soundarya-lahari #2: *tanIyAmsaM pAmsuM tava caraNa-pangkeruha-bhavaM* ...) and even of the sandals of the divine feet. Tulsi waxes eloquent on the divine sandals: "they are the two syllables of the tAraka *mantra* – Rama – to ferry humanity across the ocean of samsAra" ('*Akar jug janu jIv jatan ke*') (Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya kand, #316)

tri-mUrti-rUpAya: The Lord is in three forms: the standard elementary meaning is, they are Brahma, *Vishnu* and Shiva. But the Vedantic tenor of this *shloka* reminds us that it is not just the conventional meaning of tri-mUrti that is implied here but an esoteric intrpretation of everything that is three-fold.

> The three guNas, Satva, Rajas and tamas – all the combinations of which give you the entire world of experience;
> the three states of awareness, jAgrat, svapna and sushhupti which together give us all our world of experience but still not the Absolute state;
> the three facets of activity, by the body (*kAyena*), by the speech (*vacasA*) and by the mind (*manasA*) but still the Absolute is not accessible to any of these;
> the three portions of time, past (*bhUta*), present (*bhavat*) and future (*bhavya*);
> the three syllables that make up the mystic word *Aum* that represents *Brahman* itself;
> the three giant strides that the Lord took to measure all the three portions of universal space;
> the three yogas, Karma, *bhakti* and jnAna
> the three Vedas that spend all their words on Him but still fail to show Him to us, though it is The Absolute that is the bottomline of all the Vedas!

Recall Bhattatiri's verse (98 – 9) in this connection. Also Kamba Ramayanam: *IraNian vadaip-paDalaM* Verse 251 beginning with '*mUnru avan guNangaL* ..' in Section on Prahlada Charitam in Chapter 7.

Sahasra-nAmne

The thousand names that try to describe Him do not complete the delineation; because it can never be completed. He is *acintyaM* (not delimited by thought-process), *aprameyaM* (not delimited by any counting or measuring process), *avyapadeshyaM* (not indicatable

by any indicator), *avyavahAryaM* (not relatable) . The word '*sahasra*' only indicates the non-enumerability of His names and qualities. He actually has no name and that is why any name fits Him! Each name says something its content about the Absolute. Since there are infinite things to say about the Absolute, the count of names is endless. The power of each name has been extolled to the skies. But the power comes from the fact that the name represents the Absolute. In the standard prayer that one recites from the Vedas while doing the ritual of daily bath, one has the statement "aham asmi brahma aham asmi" meaning I am *Brahman*, *Brahman* am I. Without resorting to this ultimate statement of Existence no power, human or divine, can wash off the sins of the human mind. The *jnAnAgni* – Fire of Self-Wisdom – is what extinguishes all the actions and their imprints.

#2. Alavandar Stotram No.63

pitA tvaM mAtA tvaM dayita-tanayas-tvaM priya-suhRt
tvameva tvaM mitraM gururasi gatishcAsi jagatAM /
tvadIyas-tvad-bhRtyas-tava parijanas-tvad-gatirahaM
prapannash-caivaM saty-ahamapi tavaivAsmi hi bharaH //

To me and to all the worlds Thou art the Father, mother, beloved son, dear friend, well-wisher, teacher and the goal. I for my part am Thine – Thy servant, Thy attendant and a refugee at Thy feet. Having offered whole-hearted surrender to Thee, I remain, now, Thy sole responsibility.

This is one of the innumerable verses in the ocean of *bhakti* literature replete with the depiction of the attitude of total surrender to God. The nature and intensity of our *bhakti* depends on our level of spiritual evolution, the state of our mind and the stage of its development in this life. What will suit most of us is not the shAnta (calm) *bhakti* of Bhishma, not the vAtsalya (filial affection) *bhakti* of YasodA, not the mAdhura (love) *bhakti* of Gouranga, but the dAsya (service) *bhakti* of which there are umpteen examples. Servie to the Lord and -- mark it – to his devotees and in a larger sense to the entire humanity who are His children, this is the *bhakti* to which we can certainly rise. This *bhakti* comes out of an attitude of surrendeer as delineated in this verse of Yamunacharya, the *Guru* of Shri Ramanuja.

#3. ShivAnandalaharI – Shloka 58:

ekO vArija-bAndhavaH kShitinabho vyAptaM tamo-maNDalaM
bhitvA locana-gocaro'pi bhavati tvaM kOTi-sUrya-prabhaH /
vedyaH kim nu bhavasyahO ghanataraM kIdRgbhaven-mattamaH
tat-sarvaM vyapanIya me pashupate sAkShAt-prasanno bhava //

Oh Lord of all Beings, The one sun (which is so far away) is able to destroy the darkness that pervades earth and heaven and become visible. Your luminosity exceeds that of a crore of suns. Why then, do you (who are so near to me as my heart) not become visible to me? How intensely dense should my darkness (Ignorance) be? Please destroy this Yourself and become directly manifest to me!

#4. ShivAnandalaharI – Shloka 57:

nityaM sodara-pUraNAya sakalAn-uddishya vittAshayA
vyarthaM paryaTanaM karomi bhavataH sevAM na jAne vibho /
maj-janmAntara-puNyapAka-balataH tvaM sharva sarvAntaraH
tiShTasyeva hi tena vA pashupate te rakShaNIyo'smy-ahaM //

Day in and day out I roam about in vain in search of wealth and food for this little belly of mine. Oh Lord, I know not how to serve you. But fortunately, by some iota of merit in my past briths, You are still in my heart as in every one's and therefore, Oh Lord of Beings, You should protect me.

#5. ShivAnandalaharI – Shloka 14:

Prabhus-tvam dInAnAm khalu parama-bandhuH pashupate
pramukhyo'ham teShAm-api kimuta bandhutvam-anayoH /
tvaiyaiva kShantavyaH Shiva madapaRadhashca sakalAH
prayatnAt kartavyam mad-avanam-iyam bandhu-saraNiH//

Oh Lord, You are declared to be the Saviour of the weak and the oppressed and I am the foremost of them all. What a relationship between us! Therefore you have to absolve me of all my sins. Try, Oh Lord, make an effort, it may be difficult, but you should follow tradition and protect your relatives.

#6. ShivAnandalaharI – Shloka 29:

tvat-pAdAmbujam-arcayAmi paramam tvAm cintayAmy-anvaham
tvAmisham sharaNam vrajAmi vacasA tvAmeva yAce vibho /
vIkShAm me disha cAkShuShIm sakaruNAm divyaish-ciram prArthitAM
shambho loka-guro madIya-manasaH saukhyopadeshaM kuru //

Oh All-pervading One! I propitiate Your lotus feet. I meditate on You, the Supreme, daily. I seek refuge in You who are the Lord. Through my words I want You only. Deign to cast on Me Your Graceful look, the glance for which the gods have been praying for long. O Shambhu, the *Guru* for the entire World! Tell me what is good for me

#7. ShivAnandalaharI – Shloka 33 :

nAlaM vA sakRd-eva deva bhavatas-sevA natir-vA nutiH
pUjA vA smaraNaM kathA-shravaNam-apy-AlokanaM mAdRshAM /
svAmin – nasthira-devatAnusaraNAyAsena kiM labhyate
kA vA muktir-itaH kuto bhavati ced-kiM prArthanIyaM tadA //

'O Master! O God! Is it not enough for people like me to serve Thee even once through making obeisance, singing praise, worship, meditation, listening to Thy story, or having a sight of Thee? By what else but these can liberation be achieved? This being so, what is there to be gained by the arduous worship of ephemeral deities?" And what should they be prayed for?'

This is also what the Alvars and Nayanmars echo in their Tamil songs:

Even if I get to go to the world of Indra and enjoy the fruits of that divine living I do not want it; I would rather dwell in the delight of the utterance of the divine name, Achyuta, Lord of the Divine, Gem of the Cowherds and the like.

Ichuvai tavira yAn pOy indira lokam Alum achuvai perinum vENDEn.
#2 of tirumAlai of ToNDaraDippoDigaL, in NalAyira-divya-prabandham

Also see Shloka #5 of Dhruva Stuti in the chapter 'Gems from Shrimad BhA.'.

#8. Tayumaanavar Song (In Tamil) :

nittiyamAy nirmalamAy nitkalamAy niRamayamAy niraivay nIngAc-
cuttamumAyt-tUramumAy ccamIpamumAy turIya nirai cuDarai-yellAm
vaittirunda tArakamumAy Anandaayam Agi mana-vAk-keTTAc-
citturuvAy ninra vonRaic-cugArambapperu-veLiyAyc-cintanai ceyvOm.

Ever-permanent, without any blemish, without any ignorance, without, support, ever-full, undecayingly pure, far as well as near, like the Light beyond the three Luminaries (Sun, Moon and Fire), the One Charm that includes all, overflowing with Bliss, undiscernible to mind or speech, standing as the Collossus of Consciousness – on that vastness of the beginning of Infinite Bliss, let us meditate.

#9. Appar Tevaram 6-1-1 (In Tamil):

ariyAnai andanar tam cintayanai arumaraiyin agattAnai aNuvai
yArkkum teriyAda tattuvanait-tenaip-pAlait-tigazh oLiyait-tevargaL
tam konai maRRaik-kariyAnai nAnmuganaik-kanalaik-kARRaik-
kanaikaDalaik-kulavaraiyaik-kalandu ninRa periyAnaip
perumpaRRap-puviyUrAnaip-pesAda nALellAm piRavA nALe.

That day on which one does not speak or think of Him Who is the One that is rare to get, who is in the minds of noble souls, who is the heart of the Vedas, who is atomic, the Unknown Core of beings, the nectar and milk of salvation, the enlightening spirit, the Ruler of the Gods, the Lord *Vishnu*, the Four-faced BrahmA, the Fire, the Wind, the Water, the Earth, -- of the One who is the source of all these, the One who represents the Subtle Space Element – of that Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram, that day shall be a day lost in one's Life.

#10. Nammazhvar Tiruvaymozhi No.1 (In Tamil):

Uyarvu aRa uyarnalaM uDaiyavan evan? avan;
mayarvu aRa mathi nalam aruLinan evan? avan;
ayarvu aRu amararkaL athipati evan? avan;
tuyar aRu cuDar aDi tozhuthuezhu, en mananE.

Who has all the auspicious qualities that surpass the greatest such? That is He. Who is the One that grants you the intelligence devoid of all Ignorance? That is He. Who is the Lord of all the divines who

overcome all fatigue? That is He. His divine feet are the Light that erases all suffering. Meditate on Him Oh Mind!

#11. From Rama-KarnAmRtaM:

yannAmaiva sahasra-nAma-sadRsham yannAma vedaissamam
yannAmAnkita-vAkyam-Asura-bala-strI-garbha-vicchedakaM /
yannAma-shvapachArya-bheda-rahitaM muktes-sadA dAyakaM
tannAma-raghuRama-nAma-ramaNaM shrI-Rama-nAmAmRtaM //

That single name which alone is equivalent to the thousand names of God, that Name which is equivalent to all the vedas, that Name which in a sentence spells such terror unto the Rakshasa women as to cause them miscarriage (total destruction to the seeds of evil) , that Name which is the ever-ready donor of *moksha* equally to the lowly and the highest born – that Name is the delightful name of Rama of the Raghu clan, that Name is the nectarian Rama nAma.

#12. Adi Shankara's GangAShTakam Shloka No.8:

mAtar-jAhnavi shambhu-sanga-milite maulau nidhAyanjaliM
tvattIre vapuSho'vasana-samaye nArAyaNAnghri-dvayaM /
sAnandaM smarato bhavishyati mama prANa-prayANotsave
bhUyAd-bhaktir-avicyutA hari-hara-advaitAtmikA shAshvatI//

Mother Ganga! On your banks, where the devotees of Shambhu meet, may I lay down my mortal coil; At the start of that holy journey of the soul may I with hands raised up in anjali form on my head remember blissfully the Lotus feet of Shriman Narayana and thus a permanent non-dual *bhakti* on Hari and Hara continue to overwhelm me at the moment! (Also see the comment on this shloka in the Section on 'Shankara's Message of Oneness' in the Chapter 'The Guru').

#13. Madhusudana Saraswati's shloka on Krishna:

dhyAnAvasthita-tadgatena manasA taM nirguNaM nishhkriyaM
jyotiH kimcana yogino yadi punaH pashyanti pashyantu te /
asmAkaM tu tadeva locana-camatkArAya bhUyAt ciraM
kALindI pulineshhu yat kim api ta nIlaM tamo dhAvati //

Seated in meditation, their minds totally absorbed in that Supreme Unmanifested Reality, which is changeless, attributeless and actionless, let the Yogis see that mystic Glory of Light which they seem to visualise, but, for us, mortals, we should only yearn that there may miraculously appear before our physical eyes that bluish someonewho keeps romping on the shores of the Yamuna!

#14. Sundaramurti Nayanar TevAram – Verse 63 – 8 (Tamil):

Sollai nambi poRuLAy ninRa nambi tORRam Iru mudal Agiya nambi
Vallai nambi aDiyArkku aRuL seyya varundi nambi unakkATceyakillAr
allal nambi paDukinRaden nADi aNangorupAkam vait-teNkaNam pORRa
illa nambi iDu pichai-koL nambi ezhu-piRappum engaL nambi kaNDAyE.

Oh Master, the Best of Beings, You are the Word personified, You are also the Meaning; You are the Origin and You are also the Dissolution; in order to Grace your devotees you grieve that they are not coming back to You; instead of coming under your grace and compassion, they suffer unwisely, for reasons I know not what. You are keeping the Goddess *Shakti* in half of your body, with the GaNas attending on You, Still You accept the alms offered to you under the mistaken assumption that you need to beg; You are our Master not only in this birth but in several births to come.

#15. Shrimad BhA. X – 3 – 9,10:

tam-adbhutam bAlakam-ambujekshhaNaM
caturbhujaM shankha-gadAryudAyudhaM/
shrIvatsa-lakshhmaM gala-shobhi-kaustubhaM
pItAmbaraM sAndra-payoda-saubhagaM//
mahArha-vaiDurya-kirITa-kunDala-
tvishhA parishhvakta-sahasra-kuntalaM /
uddAma-kAnchy-angada-kangkaNAdibhiH
virAjamAnaM darshaya pANDuranga//

Show Me, Oh Lord Panduranga! that luminous unique child-form (of Yours) -- lotus-eyed, four-armed, sporting the conch, mace and other weapons; with the luminous Srivatsa mark on the chest and the shining Kaustubha on the neck; wearing a yellow cloth; possessed of the majesty and grace of a heavy rain-cloud; with locks gleaming with the lustre of the diadem and ear-rings studded with precious stones; bedecked with splenderous ornaments like bracelets, armlets and waist girdle.

Reader, please note that I have modified the last words of the twin-*shloka*. In the original, they read '*virAjamAnaM vasudeva aikshhata'* : (the form) that greeted Vasudeva's Vision. I have modified it to read '*virAjamAnaM darshaya PANDuranga*': meaning, 'that form, please show it to me, Oh PANDuranga'! It now becomes a fit prayer to the Lord!

#16: Manicka-vAchagar's TiruvAchagaM. Verse 15 of Tiruccadagam: (Tamil)

vAnAgi maNNAgi vaLiyAgi oLiyAgi
UnAgi uyirAgi uNmaiyumAy inmaiyumAyk-
konAgi yAn enadu enRu avar-avarik-kUttATTu-
vAnAgi ninRAyai en solli vAzhttuvane.

You have become the five elements: Space, Earth, Air, Fire (and Water) ; Body and Soul are You; You are the Manifest as well as the Unmanifest; You are the One who pulls the cord that makes each one of us us dance like puppets with foolish thoughts of ' I ' and 'Mine'. You are the Lord of all these; all our actions are in truth Yours. How can I ever exhaust Your Glories!

#17. ANDAL TiruppAvai. Verse No. 29 (Tamil):

CiRRam CiRu-kAle vandu unnaic-cEvittun
poRRAmarai-yaDiyE pORRum poruL kELAy
peRRam mEyttu uNNum kulattil piRandu nI
kuRREval engaLaik-koLLAmal pogAdu
iRRaippaRai koLvAn anRu kAN GovindA
eRRaikkum EzhEzh piRavikkum un-tannODu
uRROmE AvOm unakkE nAm ATceyvOm
maRRai nam kAmangaL mARRElOr empAvAi.

Please hear why, In this very early dawn, We have come to worship Your golden holy feet. You were born in our family of cow herds, And we are but there to obey your every wish, you better accept us. We have not come to get only the rewards from you, Oh Govinda. For ever and for several umpteen births, We would be only related to you, And we would be thine slaves, And so please remove all our other desires, And help us to worship Goddess Pavai.

#18. Author Unknown. On Hanuman. (In Tamil)

anjilE onRu peRRAn anjilE onRaittAvi anjilE onRu Aru Aga Aruyir kAkka Egi
anjile onRu peRRa aNangaikkaNDu ayalAr Uril anjilE onRu vaittAn
avan emmai aLittuk-kAppAn

One of the five elements fathered him
He flew through one of the five
Crossed one of the five
Found the damsel born to one of the five
And placed one of the five in the foreign land
May he shower his grace and protect us

The ‘five’ talked about here stands for the five fundamental elements: Air, Space,Water, Earth and Fire. Hanuman was the son of Vayu, the Air-God. He flew in the sky through space and crossed the Ocean of Water. In Lanka he found the place where the Earth-born Sita was in captivity and he finally set to flames the whole of Lanka.

CHAPTER 9: THE GURU

1. Devotion to the Guru

The most well-known Sanskrit verse on the concept of *Guru* is:

gurur-BrahmA gurur-VishnuH gurur-devo maheSvaraH;
gurus-sAkshAt param brahma tasmai SrI gurave namaH.

This is itself a most profound statement. It says that the *Guru* is the Creator BrahmA, the Protector *Vishnu* and the Destroyer *Shiva*. More, he is the Transcendental Absolute (= *param brahma*) itself. To that *Guru* we prostrate. Thus, the *Guru* is not just one of the Trinity, not even just all three of them. He is something beyond. Each one of them has just a specified function in the milieu of the Hindu mythology, Vedanta as well as orthodoxy. Any time you pray to one of them about your problems - they seem to help you only to a certain extent. Beyond that they transfer the blame on your past and pass

the buck to your *prArabdha* or Fate and they always get away with it in all the anecdotes of the *PurANA*s. Each one of them says that there is a Supreme (Impersonal?) Absolute beyond them and it is He (or SHE or IT ?) that prescribes what should be and what should not be; they only carry out the Supreme Will! The fact that the *Guru* is equated to this *param brahma* places him beyond the Trinity. The Absolute is actually something which transcends the three strands (= *guNas*) of *Prakriti*, namely *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The absolute is therefore *guNAtIta*, that which transcends the three *guNas*. The Absolute is also *rUpa-varjita*, devoid of form. It is such an absolute that has come as *Gu-ru* in flesh and blood -- *gu* for *guNAtIta* and *ru* for *rUpa-varjita*. This profound idea is what is implied by the following verse which is only one of the hundreds that dwell on the *Guru* concept.

gukAraSca guNAtIto rukAro rUpa-varjitaH;
gunAtItam arUpamca yat-tatvam sa guru-smRtaH.

meaning, the syllable *gu* stands for *gunAtIta* and the syllable *ru* stands for *rUpa-varjitaH.* The principle therefore that combines the transcedence beyond the *guNas* and the absence of form is what is known as *Guru*.

Guru is also known as *AchArya* and also as *deSika*. These have connotations of teacher, leader, role-model, preceptor, beacon-light. As *AchArya* he shows us the way to act not only by precept but by his own life and action. As *deSika* he prescribes the directions we should take to grow up in spirituality. The ideal *Guru* is all three - *Guru*, *AchArya* and *deSika* - put into one. One's father or mother cannot play this role effectively because they are bound to be inhibited by their own attachment. The intelligence which has been clouded by beginningless ageless ignorance can be sparked off only by the *Guru*. This is why all scriptures are very emphatic that one should seek out a *Guru*; otherwise one runs the risk of drawing conclusions about the Ultimate Truth which is beyond the capabilities of the intellect . *yenedam sarvam vijAnAti tam kena vijAnIyAt* - is a classical refrain from Ch.U.. The one by which everything is cognized cannot itself be cognized. The Transcendental Absolute has to be intuitively experienced and this experience has to be sparked by *Guru*'s precept. 'You are the very Consciousness which makes you conscious of experiences' is a statement which only a *Guru* who is in that state of Consciousness can make. He himself confirms that He was able to get to that state because of his own *Guru*. *Evam paramparA prAptaM* -- meaning, this is obtained by a legacy of generations galore - is the Lord's own statement in the *Gita* (Ch.IV). Scriptures declare the analogy of the dream state to our real waking state. Just as all dream-experience is only a passing show from the point of view of one's waking state, so also the waking state itself, according to the scriptures, is a passing show from the absolute standpoint. But this declaration does not carry conviction with us because most of us have never had the experience of that absolute standpoint. On the other hand we do understand that the dream-state is not absolutely real because we do have the experience of the waking state of awareness. Nobody is able to tell us -- or has to tell us -- from within the dream that the dream experience is unreal. **The beauty of the *Guru*-concept and the greatness of the *Guru* stem from the fact that a *Guru* does exactly this for us in respect of our waking state.** From the absolute standpoint this waking state itself is dream-like. He, being a *JIva*n-mukta (liberated, even while living), knows this as a fact of experience. He

is not only a *JIva*n-mukta who is in that absolute state of awareness all the time but he can also descend to our level of the ordinary mundane worldly waking state. He therefore prods us, with all the powers that he has, to wake up from this dream-world of ours, which we think is real. It is as if he is appearing in our dream and telling us that we are dreaming! In other words he is able to wake us up from our dream-world, himself entering our dream-world. This is one of the major reasons why without exception, every great religious and spiritual leader from India extols the importance of the *Guru* to the skies. Says Kabir, one of the greatest saints India has ever produced: 'If body is a venomous creeper, *guru* is a tank full of nectar. Should you give for *guru* your head, still the price is far less paid' ----

yaH tan vish ki belrI, guru amRt kI khAnsIs diye jo guru mile, to bhI sastA jAn //

Says Madhura-kavi-AlvAr, whose contribution to the 4000 Vaishnava hymns was just a piece of 11 four-lined stanzas on his AchArya, NammAlvAr "The name of the Great One, my AchArya, here uttered, brings nectar to my tongue and is far sweeter than the name of the Lord who willed that He should be bound with a small knotted rope!"---

kaNNinuN ciRuttAmbinAl kattu uNNap-
paNNiya perumAyan en appanil,
naNNit-tenkurugUr enRakkAl
aNNikkum amudu URum en nAvukke //
(#937 of First Thousand of NalAyira divya-prabandham)

Who is such an ideal *guru*? What are his characteristics? How do you recognize him? There are scriptures galore answering these questions. One such for instance is in the Sarva Vedanta Siddhanta Samgraha by Adi Shankara. This work has 1000 verses or so and it takes us step by step up the ladder of spiritual knowledge. Quarter way through this ascent the AchArya defines in two verses the *Guru* concept:

Srotriyo brahma-nishTo yah praSAntaH sama-darSanaH /
nirmamo nirahamkAro nirdvandvo nishparigrahaH //
anapekshaH Shucir-dakshaH karuNAmRta-sAgaraH /
evam lakshaNa-sampannaH sa gurur-brahma-vit-tamaH //

meaning, He must be an adept in all the vedas. He must be a realised Soul who is always rooted in absolute *Brahman*. Calm and serene, equanimous to the core, free from Ego, and from the evil of 'mine' and 'thine' he is devoid of all delusions of duality like happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, like and dislike, honour and dishonour, cold and heat, friend and foe and even cause and effect. He has no desire for possessions, he has no wants, is always pure in heart and mind and is at the top of his efficiency. He is an ocean of compassion and grace.

These are the qualities that make up the model *guru*. Adi Shankara himself was a *Guru* of such standards. Every one who has come in the disciplic lineage from him has lived up to that standard, each in his own unique way. The biographies of each of the ShankarAchAryas who have held the position of the pontiffs of the various Shankara Mutts, even up to the present time, are full of anecdotes which bear testimony to these

characteristics of an ideal *Guru*. Another aspect of *Guru bhakti* is the manner in which it differs and distinguishes itself from *ISvara bhakti* i.e., devotion to the Lord Almighty Himself. The Lord Almighty is inaccessible whereas a *guru* is accessible. We pray to the Lord but we generally have our own doubts whether our prayers have been heard. On the other hand a *Guru* listens to our prayer, reacts to them and brings us solace almost immediately. He may not solve our problems but the very fact he talks comfortingly to us is enough to bring us peace. The fatherly figure of a *Guru* is a great help this way for us to voice our woes and miseries and even our desires to rise up the ladder of material prosperity. When we make a mistake the *Guru* tells us in so many words and corrects us. The Lord, however, takes His own time to give us the reward or punishment - in confirmation of the legendary Tamil proverb : *deivam nindRu kollum*. Finally even as a subject of meditation the *Guru* scores over the Lord. Because, the Lord whom we have not seen, except in man-made pictures, sculptures and images, has to be imagined from head to foot or foot to head according to certain traditional descriptions. On the other hand the *Guru*, like one's own mother, comes to the mind in toto as a complete figure, not in bits and pieces that have to be put together. The Sri Vaishnava tradition lays, in addition to all the above, an extra emphasis on the *Guru*. The process of surrender to the Lord in total abandon is the cornerstone of Sri Vaishnava philosophy. Traditon insists on six components in this process. The conviction that 'the Lord will protect me under all circumstances' is the first of them. Next is the determination to do only that which is favourable to the Lord and pleasing to Him. Next comes the avoidance of everything that is unfavourable or displeasing to the Lord. These three are conditions the fulfillment of which is the rsponsibility of the devotee.

But there are three more conditions which are more difficult. They are:

1. The adoption of the Lord as the only protector;
2. Laying of one's entire self at the disposal of the Lord; and
3. The feeling of total triviality and nothingness vis-a-vis the Lord.

This is where the *Guru*'s role becomes important. Whatever one may do, one's past *karma* and present obstacles to a spiritual pursuit come in the way of the spiritual advance one yearns for, in spite of the regularity of one's life and purity of conduct. One feels that something else other than one's knowledge, conduct and faith is necessary. We realise that even if we surrender to God we are not able to ingratiate ourselves into the Lord's favour. A *Guru* actually pleads for us with the Lord on our behalf. In fact there is a saying:

Sive rushte gurus-trAtA, gurau rushte na kaScana
meaning, When the Lord is angered the *Guru* becomes the saviour
but when the *Guru* is angered, nobody can save.

We need the *Guru* for this role of his. The *Guru* enables us by precept and example to rid ourselves of the burden which we are unable to bear any more. This is technically called 'laying off the burden' - *bhAra-nyAsa* -in Sri Vaishnava terminology. According to that tradition *Guru* is equated to the *pAdukA* (= sandal) of the divine feet. Vedanta Desika's *pAdukA-sahasram* is a well-known marathon eulogy of the *pAdukA*s containing 1000

verses, all composed in one night, by the Grace of the *pAdukA*. (For details about *pAdukA*-sahasram see the Section on DeSika, later).

In the esoteric interpretations about the divine feet in the advaita tradition, however, things are a little more complicated. There is the '*tookiya tiruvaDi*' (the raised foot) of the Lord of the Cosmic Dance and there is the '*oonRiya tiruvaDi*' (the placed foot). The raised foot of the Divine gives *moksha* (liberation) from the cycle of births and deaths, whereas the placed foot disintegrates all the sins of the individual. In addition to the standard three functions of the Divine Absolute, namely, Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution, there are two more, called *tirodhAna* (= concealment, eradication, vanishing) and *anugraha* (=Grace). These five-fold phenomena constitute the entire cosmic cycle of events. Though the third function, dissolution, puts an end to everything, it does not put an end to the sins - why sins, in fact all *karma* - in the bank-balance of individual *JIva*s. They remain in latent form till the beginning of the next cycle of creation. It is only the *tirodhAna* function of the Lord that eradicates the latent *vAsanA*s stored up by past *karma*. This '*tirodhAna*' is the function of the 'placed foot' of the Divine. On the other hand, *anugraha* - Grace, the award of *moksha* is the function of the 'raised' foot of the Lord. That is why one surrenders to the '*tookiya tiruvaDi*' of the Lord for Him to grace us so that 'we are no more thrown into the deep abysses of the feminine womb to be born again'. In the advaita tradition, this '*tookiya tiruvaDi*' is equated to the *Guru*. He is the One on Earth who can grant the same Grace. The small poem *bhaja-govindam* of Adi SankarAchArya extols the lotus feet of the *Guru* for this very purpose. Incidentally the folklore is that Shankara immortalised the name Govinda in that stotra because it was the name of his *Guru*! Indeed the *Guru*'s Grace can give us a double benefit. It can give us what we want in this mundane world as well as take us towards the Lord. *Guru* destroys the ignorance of the disciple. He may do it by actual teaching, He may do it by just a blessing, or he may do it by a spiritual fiat. The last verse of *bhaja-govindam* talks of the disciple who is *guru-caraNAmbhuja-nirbhara-bhaktaH*, i.e, the one who is deeply immersed in the lotus feet of the *guru*. The profound subtlety in this reference to the feet of the *guru* here is to the fact that the *guru* stands for certain principles of behaviour as well as of wisdom. He not only stands *for* them but he stands *on* them! -- in the sense that the greatness of the *guru* goes back to the values of life for which he lives and preaches all his life. So the sandals or the feet on which he stands represent the values for which he stood. Therefore the devotion to those feet and to those sandals of the divine *guru*, will certainly confer on one the strength to respect and reverberate the same values. His 'placed foot' is ideal for us to cling close to his ideals and values. A significant *Shloka* in the tradition in connection with the concept of the *guru* ought to be more well-known than it is now. The *Shloka* is analogous to the one (beginning with *akAla-mRtyu-haraNam*) that we repeat when we take the sacred water, at the end of a ritual or a *pUjA*, in the hollow of the right hand and drink with reverence and sprinkle on ourselves, so that it may ward off untimely death, rid us of all diseases, and absolve us of all our sins. The corresponding *Shloka* for taking the holy water which has washed the feet of the *guru* is :

avidyA-mUla-nASAya janma-karma-nivRttaye /
jnAna-vairAgya-siddhyartham guru-padodakam Shubham //

The holy water off the feet of the *Guru* is so powerful that it will destroy the very root of our Ignorance (which is the cause of all *samsAra*), it will eradicate the cause-and-effect chain, the cause being our *karma* and the effect being further birth (and therefore, death); and most of all it will bestow on us the spiritual knowledge and ultimate dispassion (and then we will be right at the very goal of all Life).

2. The Hymn to the Guru of all Gurus

Introduction

This contains what is known as *dakshiNA-mUrti ashTakam*, a hymn of ten verses composed by Adi Shankara. It is a capsule version of the entire *advaita* vedanta. A famous commentary called *mAnasollAsa*, by his disciple Sri Suresvaracharya (*maNDana-miSra*, was his earlier name before he took *sannyAsa*) is our main source for interpreting this hymn. We give, for each verse,

1. the text in Sanskrit ;
2. The inimitably close adaptation of the hymn, almost in the same metre, in Tamil verse form, by Sage Ramana where the single word added to each verse by Ramana in his adaptation, is shown in **BOLD;**
3. Translation in English, with the words corresponding to the addition by Ramana being shown in **BOLD** and
4. Our own explanations, in that order.

Shloka No.0

mauna-vyAkhyA-prakaTita-para-brahma-tatvaM yuvAnaM
varshishTAnte vasad-Rshi-gaNair-AvRtaM brahma-nishTaiH /
AcAryendraM kara-kalita-cin-mudram-Ananda-rUpaM
svAtmArAmAM mudita-vadanaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtim-IDe //

MaunamAm uraiyAr kATTumAppirama-vattu-vAlan
civa-nilaittavar-caRcIDar seRi kuru varan cIrkaiyan
uvakaiyOr uruvan tannuL-Luvappavan kali-mukattAn
avanaiyAn tenpAn mUrtti-yappanai-EttuvOme //

I propitiate that *dakshiNA-mUrti*, who is the Transcendental Absolute declared by an eloquence called Silence, who is a youth, who is the best of the *Guru*s surrounded by great disciples who are themselves firmly rooted in *Brahman,* who is the prince among preceptors, who shows by his hand the *cin-mudrA*, who is Bliss personified, who revels in His own Self and who always radiates happiness.

This has been numbered verse No.0 because, it is not part of the *dakshiNA-mUrti ashTakam*. But it is traditionally recited as a preliminary verse to the hymn. Maybe it was also composed by Shankara himself. It propitiates that form of Lord *Shiva* by

which He is known as a youthful world teacher seated beneath the sacred fig-tree, facing South (*dakshiNa* means 'south') and teaching elderly disciples through silence. The South indicates a downward path (spiritually) and the North indicates an upward path. He faces south so that we may face Him and therefore face north, that is, face the side of, and look forward to, Immortality. The word *dakshiNA* means also 'efficient'. He is the One who can teach us the most difficult thoughts in the most efficient manner. He is the teacher of all teachers. He is the Ultimate which is inaccessible even to the mind and speech. His silence is an eloquence of the Experience of Bliss. He is the Form which makes us understand if only we make the effort. The Absolute and its Energy -- namely, the Lord and the Mother Goddess -- have sometimes two different Forms, sometimes a single form in which it is half masculine and half feminine - the classical *ardha-nArISvara* Form - and sometimes they have a third Form in which one of them is subordinate to the other. In the Form of *kAmAkshi* the Lord is subordinate and the feminine *Shakti* is dominant. In the Form of *dakshiNA-mUrti*, the Lord is the dominant factor; here is the Form where there is no explicit expression of vibrant Energy. The Form of the Bliss-filled Goddess is sublated by the *sat-cid-Ananda* Form of *dakshiNA-mUrti*. That is why She is called *dakshiNA-mUrti-rUpiNI* in the *lalitA-sahasranAma.*

Shloka No.1

viSvam darpaNa-dRSyamAna-nagarI tulyam nijAntar-gataM
paSyan-nAtmani mAyayA bahirivo-dbhUtam yathA nidrayA /
yas-sAkshAt-kurute prabodha-samaye svAtmAnam-AdvayaM
tasmai ShrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM ShrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

ulagu kaNNADi yUr nEruRattannuLLajnAnattAl
veLiyinuL tuyil kanAppOl viLangiDak-kaNDu jnAna-
nilaiyuRu nEran-tannai yoruvanA-yevanEr kANpAn
talaiyuRu *kuruvAm-andad-dakshiNA-mUrtti pORRi*

To Him who, by *mAyA*, who sees in Himself `the universe which is inside Him as if it were outside, just as in a dream, like unto a city that is seen in a mirror, to Him who apprehends on awakening, His own Self as the One without a second, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (**the ancient of all**) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

Shlokas 1, 2 and 3 dwell on the origin of the universe and its philosophical implications. In this verse there are two analogies cited. One is that of the dream, and the other that of the appearance of reflection in a mirror. Each serves a purpose. The dream analogy says that unless we wake up from the dream we cannot see the falsity of the dream. The mirror analogy says that even as we experience the reflection before us we know its falsity; so also even as we experience the presence of this universe 'outside' of us , we must realise their falsity, because it is only a projection of the real Self within.

There is another point of distinction between the dream analogy and the mirror-reflection analogy. In the dream analogy what is really 'within' appears as 'outside'. In the analogy of the mirror-reflection what is really outside of the mirror appears as 'within' the mirror. We have to extrapolate both the analogies and understand that the universe is actually within us but appears as outside of us by the sheer force of the projecting power of *mAyA*.

The purport of this verse is to tell us that *Brahman* is the Truth, the visible universe is only an appearance and to that extent it is unreal. When one thing appears to us as something else it is false knowledge of the thing. By reason of the *mAyA* power we have this false knowledge and think that the universe is something other than *Brahman*. But when the Realization dawns on us by the grace of the *Guru* we will then realize that there is nothing other than *Brahman*.

Shloka No.2

bIjasyAntar-ivAnkuro jagad-idaM prAng-nirvikalpaM punar-
mAyA-kalpita-deSa-kAla-kalanA-vaicitrya-citrI-kRtaM /
mAyAvI-va-vijRmbhayaty-api mahA-yogISvar-ecchayA
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

vittuLe muLaipOl munnam vikaRpamiliccakam pin
kaRpita-mAyA dEya-kAla-karmattAR-paRpala
cittiram virippAn yAvan cittanumAyikan pOR
cattiyAR *kuruvAm-andad-dakshiNA-mUrtti pORRi*

To Him, who like a magician or a great yogin, displays, by (the power of) His own Will, this universe, which earlier was undifferentiated like the sprout in the seed, but which later was made differentiated under the varied conditions of space, time and causation created by *mAyA*, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

This verse dwells on the concept that the Absolute is also the material cause of the universe in addition to its being the efficient cause. But the analogy of the tree and the seed should not be carried too far. From the seed comes out a tree, from the tree again there is another seed. From *Brahman* 'sprouts' the universe, of course, but from the universe there does not shoot forth a *Brahman*! That is why *Brahman* is called '*bIjam avyayam*' (*Gita*: 9 - 18) (= the non-perishing seed). The analogy of the *yogi* is more apt here. The use of the words '*prAk*' (earlier), MUNNAM in the Tamil version, and '*punaH*' (again), PIN in the Tamil version, is not to indicate a passage of Time, but is to show the difference between the unmanifest state and the manifested state. Time starts only in the manifested state. In the unmanifested state, Time itself was - *our language itself is failing us here! Why did we say 'was'?* - unmanifest! Just as manifestation of the Absolute is a phenomenon of *mAyA*, Time also is a phenomenon of *mAyA*.

The Absolute doing the Creation of the Universe out of Itself is indeed a difficult concept. But there is very heavy scriptural authority for this. In fact **one can give at least seven such evidences:**

Only if *Brahman* is the material cause of the world it is possible to know everything of the universe through the knowledge of *Brahman* which is what is asserted in the following passages:

kasmin nu bhagavo vijnAte sarvam-idam vijnAtam bhavati
Mu.U.*: I-1-2* What is that, knowing which, everything becomes known?

yat-jnAtvA neha bhUyo'nyat jnAtavyam avaSishyate /
B.G.*: 7 – 2* Having known which, nothing else remains to be known.

yena aSrutam Srutam bhavati, amatam matam, avijnAtam vijnAtam
Ch.U. *VI-1-3* By which unheard becomes heard, uncognized becomes cognized, unknown becomes known.

ekena mRt-piNDena sarvaM mRNmayaM vijnAtaM syAt,
vAcArambhanaM vikAro nAma-dheyaM mRttiketyeva satyaM
Ch.U. VI-1-4
By one handful of earth, all earthen articles become known, so everything that is earthen is only a play with words (and forms), what is true is only earth.

2. *bahusyaM prajAyeyeti*, (*May I be many, May I grow forth*), says T.U., II - 6. This in so many words says that He Himself became the multiplicity of created things.

3. The next statement in T.U., *tad-AtmAnaM svayaM akuruta,* says more. It means: *That itself manifested itself.* Here the use of the two words '*AtmAnaM*' and '*svayaM*' both meaning 'itself' shows that there exists no other cause. So the Universe is only a modification of *Brahman*. What *kind* of modification it is, is the only thing that the two major schools of Philosophy debate about. For an elaboration of this point, see the Section on Difference and non-Difference in the Chapter 'The Absolute As It Is'.

4. There is a standard statement in the Upanishads that 'all these beings were born from this', the word that is being used here for *Brahman*, being '*yat*'. cf. T.U. III-1:

yato vA imAni bhUtAni jAyante

This word is a connective pronoun like 'which' used to indicate an antecedent noun. '*Yat*' is a self-substituting entity. Panini's grammar gives a special meaning to this word, as *prakRti*. We know ***prakRti*** is the power of *Brahman*, which is what becomes the universe in the presence of *Brahman*.

5. The classical statement: (Ch.U., VI-2-2):

ekaM eva advitIyaM brahma /
Brahman is One only, with no second.

This says there is no supporting entity, therefore there is no other efficient cause; and secondly it says there is nothing other than *Brahman*, therefore there is no other material cause.

6. Mu. U.gives three analogies for the relationship between the universe and *Brahman*. For details see the Section '*Satyam Jnanam anantam brahma*' in the Chapter 'The Absolute As It Is'**.**

7.The Ch.U. (I-9-1) explains what happens at the time of dissolution.

sarvANi ha va imAni bhUtAni, AkASAdeva samutpadyante,
AkASaM pratyastaM yAnti /
All these elemental principles emanate from Space
and they finally dissolve into Space. :

In the T.U.also, after the statement that they all come from '*yat'* it is said (III-1) that they finally dissolve into '*yat'*.:

yat prayanty-abhisamviSanti /

A thing may be said to be produced from its efficient cause but it cannot return to that at dissolution unless it is also the material cause. This verse rejects the theory of the philosophy of *NyAya* and the philosophy of *sAnkhya.* The former holds that the atomic elements are the material cause of the universe. The latter holds that the three guNas *satva, rajas*, and *tamas* constitute the material casue of the universe. Both are rejected and this verse establishes that just as the plant was in the seed so also the universe was in its latent state in the *Atman-Brahman* and by its inherent *mAyA* power it appears as manifest.

Shloka No.3

yasyaiva sphuraNam sadAtmakam-asat-kalpArthakaM bhAsate
sAkshAt-tat-tvam-asIti veda-vacasA yo bodhayaty-ASritAn /
yas-sAkshAtkaraNat bhavenna punarAvRttir-bhavAmbhonidhau
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

evanoLi-yuNmai inmai iyaiporuLilangu nErE
evan adu nIyAnAy-enRisaittuNarttuvan cErndorai
evanai nErkANin mINDumip-pavakkaDal vIzhvillai
tavaruRu kuruvAm-andad-dakshiNAmUrtti pORRi //

To Him whose luminosity of Absolute Truth alone, shines forth in the false world of appearance, to Him who instructs those who resort to Him through the vedic text 'That Thou Art', to Him by realising whom there will be no further return to the cycle of

transmigration, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (who is attained by kinesis), the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

The phenomenal appearance of the universe is actually the shining of *Brahman* and not its own shine. The 'reality' of the universe is actually the reality of the substratum that is *Brahman*. When the movie appears on the screen, what is real is the screen, not the movie; because the screen is the only thing that is present before, during and after. *That Thou Art* is the famous Grand Pronouncement (*mahA-vAkya*) found in the *Chandogya*-Upanishad of the Sama Veda, meted out by AruNi to Svetaketu. It is repeated nine times to him and explained nine times. It is not supposed to be a casual statement. It is the *summum bonum* of all Upanishadic teaching. It says: That *Brahman* which is the common Reality behind everything in the cosmos is the same as the essential Divinity, namely the *Atman* or the Self, within you. This latter is the innermost core of our selves and so seems to have an individuality of its own. In saying that it is the same as the unqualified *Brahman* in the infinite cosmos, we seem to be identifying two things, one that is unlimited and unconditioned and one that is possibly limited and conditioned. Whenever someone says, for instance, that the person (call him B) whom you are meeting just now is the same as the one whom you saw (call him A) twenty years ago at such a such a place, what is actually meant is not the identity of the dresses of the two personalities of A and B, nor of the features (those of B may be totally different from those of A), but of the essential person behind the names. So whenever such an identity is talked about we have to throw away certain aspects which are clearly distinctive in both and cling on to only those essentials without which they are not what they are. B and A may be engaged in distinct professions, B and A may be having different names, B and A may be having different attitudes towards you or towards a certain issue, B and A may be posing as different persons, by, say, showing off different passports, -- but still they are the same, is what is being asserted. So when *Brahman* and the individual Self are being identified in this statement, we have to see what commonality or essentialness there is in them that is being identified. *Brahman* is the cause of this universe. But this is a predication of *Brahman* and is extraneous to the identity that we are talking about. We want the essentiality, the *svarUpa-lakshaNa* of both. The capability of creation is only a *taTastha-lakshaNa* of *Brahman,* that is, it is a definition which is only indicative, and does not distinguish it from everything else. The Self of Man appears to be limited by an individuality which keeps it under the spell of Ignorance; this is extraneous to the essentiality of the Self. So what we are identifying is *Brahman*, minus its feature of being the Cause of this Universe and the Self minus its limitations of Ignorance-cum-Delusion which individualises it. That these two are the same, is, in essence, the content of the statement: *tat tvam asi.* The Cosmic *mAyA* is what makes *Brahman* the cause of the universe. The individual *avidyA* (=Ignorance) is what makes the Self circumscribed and delimited. So the *mahA-vAkya* says

Brahman minus* its *mAyA* and the Self *minus* its *avidyA
are identical.

This statement '*That thou Art*' is not just a flattery of the individual Self; because the subject of discussion is vedanta where sentiment is not the issue. It is not just a

comparison between two entities; there is no necessity to compare. It actually says they are identical. There is no status of cause and effect here; the *tvam*, that is the individual self, is not the effect of Isvara as the pot is that of the potter. There is no question of attribute and subject here; because, on the one hand, if *ISvara* is the subject which is attributed by the *JIva*-guNa then it should be mortal and on the other hand, if *jIva* is the subject with *ISvara-guNa* then it should be immortal. Nor is the statement just one of worship or prayer.

Shloka No.4

nAnAcchidra-ghatodara-sthita-mahA-dIpa-prabhA-bhAsvaraM
jnAnaM yasya tu cakshurAdi-karaNa-dvArA bahi-spanditam /
jAnAmIti tameva-bhAntam-anubhAty-etat samstaM jagat
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

PalatuLaik-kuDattuL dIpap-pAykadir pOl-yAr jnAnam
vizhi-mudar-poRi-vAyp-pAyndu veLi-sarit-taRindEn-enna
viLangiDum-evanaic-cArndu viLangum-ivvavani-yAvum
calamaRu-kuruvAmanDad-dakshiNAmUrtti pORRi //

To Him who is luminous like the light of a great lamp set in the belly of a pot with many holes, to Him whose knowledge moves outward through the eye and other organs, to Him who shining as 'I know' makes all this entire universe known, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (who has no movement or vibration) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

Shlokas 4, 5 and 6 talk about the Seer in us. It is the Light of the Spirit within that leaks out of the senses and gives Light to all the objects and experiences in the universe. This is the purport of this verse. It broadcasts from the housetops the one Truth repeatedly proclaimed by the scriptures: 'It is not lit by the light of the sun, nor by the light of the Moon, nor stars, nor by lightning nor by fire. Only through its Light do all the others shine.' (*katha*-upanishad, 2 - 2 - 15):

na tatra sUryo bhAti na candra tArakaM naimA vidyuto bhAnti kuto'yam-agniH /
tameva bhAntam-anubhAti sarvaM tasya bhAsA sarvam-idam vibhAti//

It is the Light of the universe. By its shining all else is seen. Even an ordinary light (from lamp when lit) does not need another light to show its existence. When such is the case, the Supreme Light which lights up everything does not need any other equipment to see it. It is *svayam-prakASaM*, self-luminous. In the dream world the one Light that is the Self lights up hundreds of objects; it needs only a little extrapolation to conclude that even in the the waking world it is the Light of the Self again that lights up everything . Ordinary matter does not have a luminosity of its own. If everything had a luminosity of its own, then a chair and a table should make their presence felt by us even when we do not 'look' at them. If nothing was ever luminous, then we would be totally ignorant of everything. Thus matter in the world needs a 'light' to make their presence felt. We wrongly think that it is the physical light that brings the knowledge of matter to us. Even

the physical light has to be prompted, supported, boosted, in fact 'lighted' by the spiritual Light which is the substratum of all - this is what the scripture says when it declares that '*only by Its Light everything is lighted'.*

The supreme is shining as the Light of Lights (*jyotishAm jyotiH*) within ourselves. This is analogous to a lighted lamp placed in a vessel with several small holes in it. The Light of the Self which is within this body of nine gates is then reflected by *mAyA* through the sense organs and projected as rays of bliss -- because what is inside is full of bliss. Wherever these rays fall -- on the objects of sense, for instance -- those objects come to light. The soul which identifies itself with the body and the senses wrongly thinks that the sense of happiness that he derives in 'seeing', 'hearing', 'smelling', 'touching' and 'tasting' is actually in the external sense object and it is these rays from the senses that bring him this happiness.

Take another analogy. There is a tent full of holes which allow the rays of sunlight to creep in. A child who is inside the tent may wrongly think that it is the tent that gives the light. Actually the child does not realize it is the tent that is an obstacle to the light from the Sun and it is the holes in the tent that bring the sunlight in. In the same manner we do not realize that it is the body-mind-intellect that hides the Light of the Self within and it is the holes of the sense-organs that sneak in the bliss from that Light now and then through the various sense-experiences. And we mistake the happiness we enjoy as that which arises from the sense objects. Suppose the child attempts to get the light that it needs from the very tent which prevents light from coming in; so also we are so childish spiritually that we expect to improve our happiness from the very sense objects and sense organs which prevent us from 'seeing' the Light of the Self which is already there in us. If we cast away the tent the whole place will be flooded with all the light from the sun; so also if we cast away the identification with the body-mind-intellect we will become the mass of Bliss that is natural to the Self.

Shloka No.5

dehaM prANamapIndriyANyapi calAm buddhiM ca SUnyaM viduH
strI-bAlAndha-jaDopamAs-tvahamiti bhrAntA bhRSaM vAdinaH /
mAyA-Shakti-vilAsa-kalpita-mahA-vyAmoha-samhAriNe
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

uDaluyir poRikaL pundi -yonRu-pAzhagamAt-tErvar
maDandaiyar bAlar-andar maDaiyarEy mUDavadi
maDamaiyil viLaiyumam-mA mayakkamE mAykku jnAnat-
taDaiyaRu kuruvAm-andad-dakshiNAmUrtti pORRi

Those who think of the body, breath, the senses, the changing intellect, or the void as the 'I', are just like deluded women, children, the blind and the stupid who only talk much. To Him who destroys the great delusion caused by the expression of the power of *mAyA*,

to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (who has no confusion) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

From the atheism of the *cArvAkas* down to the *Sunya* theory of Buddhism, all the opinions are delusions. These delusions will vanish once the intuitive perception of the Transcendental Absolute dawns on us. The body cannot be the Self, because it is visible, it is inert, it has colour and form, it has parts, it is made up of the five elements of matter. Also, if body were the Self, even when it is sleeping, even when it is in coma, in fact, even after death, it should be able to recognize itself as 'I'. The senses cannot be the Self, because, the blind, the deaf, the lame all can recognize the 'I' in them. The vital breath *prANa* cannot be the Self because when the body is sleeping, the *prANa* is still working, but it is not sentient as is clear from the fact that it does not recognize the purse being pick-pocketed from its body. The intellect cannot be the Self because it exists neither before nor after life in the body and even while it exists in the body it is so full of change that you can never call it the immutable!

Two serious doubts arise in the minds of the learners of this verse. One is a legitimate doubt about Sunya. The other is the reference to 'women' in what appears to be an uncomplimentary reference. Throughout the religious literature of Hinduism whenever the reference to 'women' appears in a similar strain it must be clearly understood that the reference is not to women as such but to the natural quality of an irrational fickleness that society ascribes to women, which quality unfortunately may be present in anybody, man or woman, and it is that quality that is talked about here and elsewhere. It is in the same strain as the reference to the blind. It is not 'the blind' that is referred to but the quality of their 'not being able to see' is what is referred.

Now let us come to 'Sunya'. The question is: Why is the void not the Self? The 'void' comes in the discussion because of a gradation of logical alternatives. The body, the prANa, the senses, the mind - none of these is the Self. Remember that those who contend that these are the Self have started from the premise that there is no Self within, except one or more of these. So when by logical argument you prove to them that the Self which seems to be the motivating power within cannot be the body, cannot be the senses cannot be the mind, - the next subtle contender for being the Self is the concept of changing consciousness (kshaNika-vijnAna). That is, the series of momentary cognitions. This could be the Self. But the very fact that each instant it changes its awareness of things, denies it the status of the Self. What is ceaselessly changing cannot be the Self. And so now comes the proponent of Sunya who says: There is no Self at all. In deep sleep there is nothing, there is only void -- neither the subject of experience nor any object of experience. Therefore says the Sunya-vAdin: The Self is 'nothing'. Sankara calls this also, a misapprehension. To see the strength of his logic regarding Sunya let me quote from various masters and experts. Each one contributes, in a uniquely different way, to a better understanding.

1. TMP Mahadevan in his commentary on the sixth verse: Advaita examines experience as a whole in its triple form - waking, dreaming and sleep. The evidence of sleep is of special importance for it is not obtainable otherwise. Sleep is not a state of emptiness.

While in waking and dreaming consciousness is related to a world of images and objects, in sleep it shines as Existence unrelated to anything else. Consciousness is not to be regarded as a characteristic of the mind, because in sleep there is no mind, and yet there is consciousness. That there is consciousness in sleep is clear because on waking up we say: I slept happily, I did not know anything. Just as consciousness is required for knowing the presence of anything even so it must be there for knowing the absence of all things.

2.From 'Advaita-bodha- deepika' published by Ramanashram: (p.75)

Disciple: When according to your instructions I enquire into the five sheaths and reject them as being non-self, I do not find anything left but simple void. Where then is the Self?
Master: To say that there is nothing left behind the five sheaths, is like saying 'I have no tongue to speak'

D. How so?

M. Unless one has a tongue one cannot say that one has no tongue to speak with. Similarly unless there is the seer of the void one cannot say there was nothing left. Otherwise one must not say anything. On the contrary since the speaker says that nothing is seen, it is obvious that the Self remains there revealing nothing besides Itself.

3. From Swami Chinmayananda's explanation of Verse 51 in Atma-bodh: When a lighted lamp is put on a table, no doubt its glowing illumination plays upon the surfaces of the various objects in the room and in varying degrees of intensity it illumines the objects. But as soon as the lighted lamp is slowly and carefully lowered into a pot or a jar, the light of the lamp must come to illumine only the inner space of the jar. Similarly, Consciousness, while playing through the equipments, no doubt gets reflected upon the objects and provides us with their knowledge; but when we have withdrawn the Consciousness from the vehicles into Itself, it can illumine only Itself.

4. Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood in their explanation of Patanjali's Yoga sutra I - 38 in 'How to know God" In dreamless sleep the two outer coverings are removed and only the causal sheath, the ego-sense, remains. It follows therefore, that we are nearer to the Atman in dreamless sleep than in any other phase of our ordinary unspiritual lives; nearer - yet so far, for what separates us is the toughest covering of the three, the basic layer of our ignorance, the lie of otherness. And this sheath can never be broken through by mere sleeping. We cannot hope to wake up one morning and find ourselves united with Reality. Nevertheless, some faint hint, some slight radiation of the joyful peace of the Atman does come through to us in this state and remains with us when we return to waking consciousness.

5. From Panca-daSi (by Vidyaranya Swami) I - 5:

supto-thitasya saushupta-tamo-bodho bhavet-smRtiH /
sA cA-vabuddha-vishayA avabuddhaM tat-tadA tamaH //

Meaning: The knowledge of ignorance caused by sound sleep, becomes a memory (the technical name for this is pratyabijnA; this is taken up in the 6th verse of dakshiNA-mUrti stotraM) when the individual wakes up. That memory has as its substance only what has been experienced. Therefore, when one sleeps, certainly there has been cognition of 'absence of perception', also called 'ignorance'. Explanation: When we go into a dark room without light, we know there is darkness. In other words we 'see' darkness. In sound sleep we (now) know we were then unaware of everything and it is this cognition of ignorance that becomes the memory: 'I did not know a thing when I slept' .

6. From one of millions of Sri Ramana's observations:

Is dreamless sleep empty of all consciousness? That may be what you feel after waking from sleep. You do not do so in sleep itself. That in you which now feels that sleep is unconsciousness is your mind. But it was not present in your sleep and it is natural for the mind to be ignorant of the consciousness there is in sleep. Not having experienced sleep, it is unable to remember what it was like and makes mistakes about it. The state of deep sleep is beyond the mind. The waking mind cannot judge of sleep.

7. From Sloka No.12 of Sad-darSanam, translation of Ulladu-nArpadu, by Sri Ramana.: Neither sleep nor the cognition of objects is knowledge; In the true state, which is different from both, there is no awareness of objects. But consciousness alone shines. Hence it is not void.

8. Adapted From the explanations by Swami Nikhilananda and Swami Ghambirananda of Sloka No.IV-83 of MANDUkya-kArikA:

There are four alternatives. Either Atman exists independently as different from us -- and in order to make it different from impermanent objects as a jar, it is said to react iversely, sometimes happily and sometimes sorrowfully. The changeability is the fault of this theory. Or the Atman does not exist differently that is, it is inactive, because of its constant nature. This theory makes the denial of existence a constant feature and so, consciousness of our own self has to be denied nd this is the fault. Some assert the state of both existence and non-existence; this has a double fault, namely both the faults of the earlier two theories. Then there is the total non-existence of the Self on account of everything ending in absolute negation or void; this is the nihilist view. The fault of this is one has to deny the very existence of oneself by this. So all these theories are delusions, says the sloka which goes as follows:

asti nAsty-asti nAstIti nAsti nAstIti vA punaH /
cala-sthiro-bhayA-bhAvaiH AvRNotyeva bAliSaH //

Meaning: Childish (note the usage of this word here) persons verily cover It (fail to know It) by predicating of It such attributes as existence, non-existence, existence and non-existence and absolute non-existence, through ideas of changeability, unchangeability, both changeability and unchangeability, and non-existence.

9. Viveka-cUDAmaNiH Shloka No.218:

asau sva-sAkshiko'bhAvo yataH svenA-nubhUyate /
ataH paraM svayaM sAkshAt pratyagAtmA na cetaraH //

Meaning: (This sloka comes after one has negated the five sheaths as not-self). Whatever experiences the non-existence of everything else has itself as the witness to this experience. Therefore the Inner Self is the Absolute; nothing else is. 10. Extracted from Sankara's bhAshya on the gItA for Shlokas X111 -1 and XVIII -50: On XIII-1: (*kshetrajnaM cApi mAM viddhi …*) That the changeless actionless Self is the knower is only a figure of speech. Fire has the property of heat. But just as we give it the agency of the action of burning; so also the Self has been given the agency of knowing. This agency is actually our superimposition on the actionless changeless Self. So when we say the Self is conscious of being aware of nothing in sleep, it should be understood in the same manner of speaking. It is in this sense that the Lord says: 'Who thinks of This as the killer …' (*ya enaM vetti hantAraM* …) (II-19); 'He does not take anybody's sins …' (*nAdatte kasyacit pApaM* …) (V - 15). On XVIII-50: (… *yathA brahma Apnoti* …) How does one know the Self?, is the disputant's question. The contention is 'both Consciousness and the Self are formless and changeless; how does knowledge take place?'. Some think that the body is the Self. Some think it is the senses. Some think it is the mind. Some think it is still deeper, it is the avyakta, the unmanifest factor. All these have the stamp of the Consciousness that is the Self. That is why the confusion arises whether these are themselves the Self. None of these is the Self. We have only to discard all this non-self, which have name and form. We do not have to be conscious of anything extra. It is the consciousness that is felt along with everything that is non-self. It is because of this that there is also a contention that there is nothing other than these feelings of cognition and so there is no Self other than the feelings. They contend that these feelings are self-validating, and so needs no other proof. In reality, therefore, what we have to do is only to discard the non-Self; we do not have to take any more effort to 'understand' or 'know' brahman. The tragedy here, is that the differentiations are nothing but names and forms stipulated by Ignorance and this has misled our discretion and intellect – the consequence being what is most explicit in us looks implicit, what is well-known to us appears unknowable, what is nearest seems distant, what is our own self turns out to be something other than ourselves. In sum, even the absence of everything has to be 'cognized'. The cognizer is consciousness. It first of all illumines its own presence without any external help - just as we know;'I am'. If in sleep we do not feel this illumination it is because of the presence of the ego in us. The 'memory' of unawareness that was there in sleep is '*pratyabijnA*', which is an internal phenomenon, not of the mind, but of the ego - because of its faint contact with the radiation of joyful peace which is natural to us and with which we have an 'asymptotic' contact, as it were, during sleep. It is this natural peace which we discover after we have discarded everything else, thus ending, not with void, but with the Self.

Shloka No.6

rAhu-grasta-divAkarendu sadRSo mAyA-samAcchadanAt
sanmAtraH-karaNopa-samharaNato yo'bhUt sushuptah pumAn /

prAg-asvApsam-iti-prabodha-samaye yah-pratyabhijnAyate
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

IRAGU-PARRI RAVI TINGALENA-VULAN MAYAI MUDAP-PARAVULAMODUNGAT-TUNGIP-PARAVIDA-VUNARUM KALAM PURA-VURANGINA-NANENRU PODANAMEVAN PUMANAYC-CARACARA-KURUVAM-ANDAD-DAKSHINA-MURTTI PORRI

To The Self, who in sleep becomes Pure Existence, on the withdrawal of the veiling by *mAyA*, as in the case of the sun or the moon in eclipse, and on waking recognizes, 'I have slept till now' to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (of the animate and the inanimate) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

This is actually a rebuttal of the Buddhist theory that the absence of knowledge in sleep shows that the Ultimate is Emptiness. This verse is a very important one, because this brings in the punch line with respect to the debate with the nihilist point of view. When there is nothing presented to consciousness, as in the case of deep sleep, it is not as if consciousness is not there. The very fact that later one is able to say 'nothing was presented to my consciousness' shows that consciousness was aware of that nothingness. So consciousness is never absent. When the sun is under eclipse, the sun does not vanish. It is there all by itself. It is our view that is mutilated and distorted. It is this wrong perception that is removed by the *Guru* of all *Guru*s.

In deep sleep consciousness is there all by itself. It is not necessary to have another agency show the presence of consciousness. It is self-luminous. In a dark room it is not necessary to have a torch to find a lighted lamp. The lighted lamp itself is self-luminous. The silent condition of the mind without thoughts of objects is the pure conscious condition of oneself. The bliss of sleep and the ignorance that characterises sleep are both experienced by Consciousness. This consciousness is *Brahman*. The 'memory' of sleep as well as the happiness of sloeep is technically called *pratyabhijnA*. It is knowing oneself by oneself. When it is used as a verb, as in this verse (*pratyabhijnAyate*), it is a peculiar grammatic usage called *karma-kartari prayoga*. It is like saying that a calf released itself from the knot which held it on to the pole. The verb means: 'to come to oneself, recover consciousness'. The statement 'I slept happily' has a factor of awareness in it, a factor of bliss, and a factor of existence. These three are the *cit*, *Ananda* and *sat* of the *sac-cidAnanda* that is the Ultimate. The happiness that was enjoyed was not the pleasure of the senses, because the senses had gone to sleep. It was not the happiness of the soul resting, because the soul was always what it was: cf.

nAsato vidyate bhavo nAbhAvo vidyate sataH /
What is not can never be, nor can what is, cease to exist
(Here the meaning of 'is' and 'is not' should be taken in an absolute sense.)

Also it is incorrect to say that the happiness enjoyed during sleep was just the absence of unhappiness, because there was no instrument of enjoyment present. The *pratyabhijnA* cannot recall what was not experienced. Again it is incorrect to say that each instant the knower is changing and so instant after instant different knowers are registering different

pieces of knowledge and therefore there cannot be any *pratyabhijnA*. This is a view called *kshaNika-vijnAna*. The buddhist philosophy therefore explains away the *pratyabhijnA* as delusion. But it is not a delusion. A recalling always needs continuity of consciousness between the past event and the present event of recalling and this continuity for recalling is available because the Seer never loses His Sight in view of His immutability. cf. (*bRhad-AraNyaka*-Upanishad)

Shloka No.7

bAlyAdishvapi jAgrathAdishu tathA sarvAs-vavasthAs-vapi
vyAvRttAs-vanuvartamAnam-ahamityantah-sphurantaM sadA /
svAtmAnaM prakaTI karoti bhajatAM yo mudrayA bhadrayA
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

KUZHAVI-MUN-NANAVU MUNNAK-KURU PAL-LAVATTAI YELLAM CUZHALINUN-KALANDIRUNDE SOLIKKUM-MAGAMA-NALUM KAZHAL-VIZHUVORK-KAR TANNAIK-KATTUVAN CIR-KURIPPAR-RAZHAL-VIZHIK-KURUVAM-ANDAD-DAKSHINA-MURTTI PORRI

To Him, who, by means of the beatific hand-*mudra*, manifests to His devotees His own Self, that, for ever, shines within as 'I' continuously in all the various states such as infancy, etc., such as waking, etc., to Him of the form of the *Guru*,(who has the eye of the fire of wisdom) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

Shlokas 7, 8 and 9 talk about the Light in us that makes us see. Whoever was there before I went to sleep and whatever I am after I woke up from sleep, -- the two are the same and it is the same 'Me' that was also having the experience of sleep during my deep sleep; this insight is called *pratyabhijnA*. Whatever stage of life and in whatever state of awareness we are, the concept of 'I' is the single truth that survives as the continuing thread; that is the Self. It is that which remains when all that we call 'mine' is removed from what we usually, in the mundane world of activity, refer to as 'I'. To recognize this no effort need be made, says Shankara in another context: we have only to dispel our beginningless ignorance. The tragedy here says he, is that the differentiations are nothing but names and forms stipulated by ignorance and this has misled our discretion and intellect the consequence being

atyanta-prasiddham suvijneyam Asanna-taram Atmabhutam-api
aprasiddham durvijneyam atidUram anyad-iva pratibhAti avivekinAm //
What is most explicit in us looks implicit,
what is well-known to us appears unknowable,
what is nearest to us seems distant,
what is our own self turns out to be
something other than ourselves.

That this Self is the same as the Transcendental Reality, *Brahman*, is what is shown by the Preceptor's '*cin-mudrA'* - the handpose showing the union of the index finger and the thumb. The index finger represents the 'thou' of *'That Thou art*' and the thumb represents the 'that' of the same Grand Pronouncement. Observe that we naturally point to the person

opposite to us by the index finger and point to ourselves by the thumb. The identification of the two by the handpose uniting the two fingers is just the teaching of the Grand Pronouncement. That the 'thou' is Consciousness can be logically arrived at. That the 'that' is also Consciousness also appeals to our reason. That the two things identified by intellectual reasoning as Consciousness are actually the same Consciousness is however impossible to reason out. That last step in the enlightenment needs the declaration of the vedas and the prompting of the *guru*. That is exactly what the *cin-mudra* shows and says.

Verse No.8

viSvam paSyati kArya-kAraNatayA sva-svAmi-sambandhataH SishyAcAryatayA tathaiva pitR-putrAtmanA bhedataH / svapne jAgrati vA ya esha purusho maYA-paribhrAmitaH tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

ULAGAI-YAR-IPPUMANOKKURUM-PALA NANAK-KANAVIR KALANGIYE MAYAIYALE KARIYA-KARANAM-PIN-RALIAVANUN-DASAN CIDAN GURU-MAHAN-RANDAI-YADI TALA-MURU-KURUVAM-ANDAD-DAKSHINA-MURTTI PORRI

To The Self who, deluded by *mAyA*, sees, in dreaming and waking, the universe in its distinctions, such as cause and effect, property and proprietor disciple and teacher, and father and son, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (of the whole Universe) the blessed *dakshinA-mUrti*, is this prostration.

All our relationships in the mundane world are only manifestations of the same Ultimate, just as in dream the same mind produces multifarious characters and relationships which are all unreal though they appear as totally real within the dream. Even in the waking state what appears as the multiplicity is actually a manifestation of the Unity at the base. The natural question that this may raise is the following: If the relationship of *guru* and disciple does not have an absolute reality then how do you expect it to give an absolute knowledge of Truth. But recall how using the unreal reflections in a mirror we wipe off the dirt in our face.So also the philosophical teaching done in the phenomenal state does produce the knowledge of Reality in the Absolute sense.

> The familiar method of giving analogies to everything in Vedanta in order to bring home the point has been very effectively used here by our ancient masters. Actions done in a dream do have real effects outside of the dream. For example, a man may have a wet dream.

The worldly relationships are therefore neither true nor false ; they are what is called an indescribable (*anirvacanIya*) phenomenon. That is exactly what *mAyA* is. Since it appears it is not totally unreal. Since it vanishes at the onset of Enlightenment, it is not totally real. That is why it is neither *sat* nor *asat*.

There is a beautiful analogy from the mathematical world for this. There are several levels of infinity in Mathematics. The lowest level of infinity is that of the set of numbers 1,2,3, … . A higher (larger) level of infinity is that of all points on any line segment. It is a difficult proposition to decide whether this higher level is really the next higher level or whether there is another level of infinity in between. That there is no such intermediate level was conjectured for long. In the thirties Godel proved that this conjecture cannot be disproved. In the sixties Cohen proved that it cannot also be proved. Thus this conjecture has got the famous stature of an 'undecidable' proposition in Mathematics.This undecidability is the status of *mAyA* in vedanta.

When the Enlightenment sets in all this world of multiplicity is shown to be only our mental construct. That is why the scriptures require us to 'sacrifice in the fire offering the Ego of the Self ', so that the Self alone remains:

aham-eva-aham mAm juhomi svAhA /
yajur-veda, taittirIya AraNyaka, nArAyana-Upanishad

Shloka No.9

bhUr-ambhamsy-anilo'nalombaramahar-nAtho himAmSuh-pumAn
ityAbhAti carAcarAtmakam-idam yasyaiva mUrtyashTakaM /
nAnyat-kimcana vidyate vimRSatAM yasmAt-parasmAd-vibhoH
tasmai SrI-guru-mUrtaye nama idaM SrI-dakshiNA-mUrtaye //

MANPUNAL-ANAL-KAL VANA MADI-KADIRON PUMANUM-ENROLIR CARACARAN-CER-IDUVEVAN-ETTU MURTTAM
ENNUVARK-KIRAI-NIRAINDON-EVANIN-ANNIYAN-CARRINRAR
TANNARUT-KURUVAM-ANDAD-DAKSHINA-MURTTI PORRI

To Him who appears as the moving and unmoving universe consisting of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Space, the Sun, the Moon and the Individual Person, to Him beyond whom, supreme and all-pervading, there is nothing else how much you may search, to Him of the form of the *Guru*, (full of Grace and Peace) the blessed Dakshinamurti, is this prostration.

The delusion caused by *mAyA* can be removed only by the Grace of the Lord. The Realization of the Absolute can be obtained only by the Grace of the Lord who appears in the form of the *Guru*. In the Saiva Agamas there are 36 fundamental principles, have been enunciated. Of them the only ones which are understood by a direct experience are the five elements, Sun, Moon and the Self.

(Note that 'Space' the most subtle of the five elements
is also included here as subject to direct experience;
because, every time you open your eyes
you know that space is enveloping you).

That is why the Lord is said to be of the eight-fold form (*mUrty-ashTakaM*) consisting of these eight. Probably this is the reason why this hymn is called *dakshiNA-mUrti-*

ashTakaM even though it contains a total of ten verses. (*ashTakam* - means a hymn of eight verses).

'Beyond whom, supreme and all-pervading, there is nothing else, however much you may search' - is in fact the bottom line of all the scriptures. Cf. *vedaiSca sarvair-aham-eva-vedyaH* /(*bhagavad-Gita* XV - 15) I am the One to be known from all the vedas. Also: *yasmAt-paraM na-aparaM asti kimcid-yasmAn-nANIyo'sti na jyAyo'sti kimcit (nArAyaNopanishat)* meaning: That beyond which there is no supreme, there is no greater, no smaller.

There is a piece of four chapters, of about 130 verses in the *mahA-bhArata*, which gives a list of what Spirituality is. It is narrated to King Dhrita-rashtra by the divine sage Sanat-sujata, the mind-born son of Creator *BrahmA*. It turns out to be a synthesis of the entire vedanta made by the most knowledgeable person, who got his own spiritual insight by a direct inspiration from the *dakshiNA-mUrti* form of *Shiva*, the form itself being a manifestation for the very purpose of giving, not only the knowledge of *Brahman*, but the state of being *Brahman* (cf. Knower of *Brahman* is *Brahman*). In this synthesis by Sanatsujata, there is an interesting analysis of vedas versus knowledge. The question is raised: What is the result of mastery of the vedas? The answer is scholarly. Truth is One. That is all what the vedas are supposed to reveal. The root word *vid*, from which the word veda is derived has several connotations; to be, to exist, to know, to be conscious of, to enquire, to gain. The One that exists is the Ultimate Supreme Consciousness. The thing to know is that One without a second. This is the bottom line. That has to be enquired into. And by that enquiry you reach the highest gain, namely, *moksha*. This is all there is to know from the entire vedas. Instead of learning this single lesson from the vedas one keeps on going round and round the truth. Thus the vedas become a vast ocean of words. Truth does not need so much scholarship. Those who possess scholarship of the vedas are called brahmins. But the real brahmins are those who are firmly established in that One Truth. There is no single knower of all the vedas. By knowing the vedas one does not know what is to be known. The knower of the vedas knows only what the vedas say. But the knower of Truth is different. By studying the vedas one gets to acquire knowledge but neither these knowers nor the vedas themselves know the Reality. Even then, it is the vedas which point to that Reality for the knower of the vedas to become the knower of *Brahman*. The vedas cannot make you the knower of *Brahman*. Let us not confuse understanding with a larger vocabulary. Like the branches of a tree which help to indicate the direction in which to look for the archlike streak of the moon two days after new moon, the vedas only show you the way. Only when your conviction of Truth is not just in your brain but also in your Being can you vouch for its validity. Let us just quote two verses in this analysis: (Chapter II: 42, 43):

na vedAnAM veditA kaScid-asti vedena vedaM na vidur na vedyaM / yo veda
vedaM sa ca veda vedyaM yo veda vedyaM na sa veda satyaM //

yo veda vedAn sa ca veda vedyaM na taM viduH veda-vido na vedAH / tathApi
vedena vidanti vedaM ye brAhmaNA veda-vido bhavanti //

None of the vedas know Him (who is of the nature of the Knower). For the vedas do not help us to know Him nor the known (The World). One who knows the Knower knows also the known. But one who knows only the known knows not the Truth. // One who knows the vedas, knows the knowable. But neither the knower of the vedas nor the vedas themselves know That. Yet those seekers of *Brahman* who become the knowers of the vedas know *Brahman* with the help of the vedas.

Shloka No.10

sarvAtmatvam-iti sphuTIkRtam-idaM yasmAd-amushmin-stave
tenAsya SravaNAt-tathArtha-mananAd-dhyAnAcca sankIrtanAt /
sarvAtmatva-mahAvibhUti-sahitaM syAdISvaratvaM svataH
siddhyet-tat punarashTadhA pariNataM caiSvaryam-avyAhataM //

CARUVAMUM TANA NANRAYC-CARRUMIT-TOTTIRATTIN
CIRAVANAN-TANNAL-ARTTA CINTANAN-DYANAN-GANAM
PURIVADALELLAN-TANAM BUDISERISAN-RANMAI
MARUVIDU MARRU METTA MADIVARU CELVAN-TANE

In this hymn of praise what has been explained is the state of being the Self of All. By hearing this, by reflecting on its meaning, by meditating on it and by reciting it one will attain the Lordship certainly, but , along with the grand attainment of the state of being the Self of All, also, the unrestrained eight-fold supra-normal powers.

The *sarvAtmatvaM*, all-Self-hood, that this final verse talks about is in fact the end of all Spirituality. *He who sees Me everywhere, and who sees in Me everything, to Him I am never lost nor is he lost to Me* - so says the Lord, (*Gita*, VI - 30):

yo mAM paSyati sarvatra sarvaM ca mayi paSyati /
tasyAhaM na praNaSyAmi sa ca me na praNaSyati //

It is the vision of One-ness amidst the plurality of experience. Perception of difference arises because of the recognition of name and form. The enlightened one however, sees the tile, the stone, the golden brick, all in the same way: (*Gita*, 14 - 24):

sama-loshTASma-kAncanaH /

The normal human being is distracted by the multiplicity of appearances and behaves like a child which cannot see the wood behind the wooden elephant and is carried away by the 'elephant'. We are really in a dream state and refuse to believe there is a more real world outside of our mundane excitements. We are not able to shake off the glamour of plurality and see the essential unity in all that we see. We tend to look at the multiplicity of things only in their separateness and variety of operation. We see the waves, not the ocean. On the other hand, the scriptures presecribe that we should see only the Lord's presence in whatever we see; hear only the melody of Krishna's flute in whatever we hear; taste only the *amRt*-like sweetness of the *GamgA* that is flowing from the head of Lord *Shiva*, in whatever we taste; smell only the fragrance of the dust of the Holy Feet of

the Mother Goddess, in whatever we smell; and feel only the touch of the *abhaya-hasta*, of Lord Sri Rama, in whatever we touch.

3. Miraculous Lineage of Mystic Masters

The ten great Masters of India whom we shall highlight in this Section had certainly the Fire of Spirituality common in all of them. But in addition to their commonality of being towering giants of spirituality, what is especially important for the understanding of the Indian psyche is the following fact: **All these masters were renouncers and ascetics. But successive generations of householder populations of India would listen to and follow these renouncers and ascetics, almost to the letter, not only in matters of the Spirit but even in secular matters and personal problems connected with the duties and obligations of a householder.** We shall offer only some very brief sketches.

Shankara

One of the earliest mystic Masters of India is Shankara, (788 - 820 C.E. ?) more properly known as *Adi ShankarAcArya*, the prefix *Adi* meaning the prime, the original, the first. For convenience of communication, we shall refer to him as Shankara throughout. Shankara's interpretations of Vedanta have so dominated the intellectual life of the country and has become so well-known in the rest of the world that his work has almost become synonymous with Vedanta inspite of the fact that other interpretations exist and are followed widely. One measure of Shankara's influence is that it is very difficult for any one either Hindu or non-Hindu to read Indian religious texts without unconsciously seeing them through the general interpretation given by Shankara. The great temples and holy places of India where he lived, preached and prayed, have made his name legendary and have left an indelible image in the Hindu mind. His greatness is not only in the context of Hinduism and Indian philosophy. His exposition of Advaita has a relevance to the cultural history of the entire world philosophy This is because Advaita does not need for its validity the symbolism or the prop of the religion and mythology of Hinduism. The one fact that comes to the mind of a non-Indian the moment the country of India is mentioned is its contribution to the spiritual evolution of the human species over the centuries, particularly through its Vedic and Upanishadic thought processes But if any single individual Master is to be associated with this contribution one of the earliest such is Shankara. It goes back to as early as the second century BCE. Even this date of Shankara is controversial. In fact anything that is connected with Shankara is mystifying, if not controversial.

Shankara was not only a great philosopher who professed a sophisticated philosophy with precision and clarity but he was a great reformer also. In his short span of 32 years he achieved what no one ever before or after him achieved. At the age of three he had mastered the language of Sanskrit. At the age of six he had already learnt whatever formal learning there was to learn. At the age of eight he was ready to renounce the mundane world along with its glamour and he did. Before the age of twelve he had already found his formal *Guru* at whose feet he reached the shores of all existing knowledge at that time. By the age of sixteen he had already written his famous

commentaries (*bhashyas*) on the Upanishad*s*, the *Gita*, the *Brahma-sUtras,* the *Vishnu sahasra-nAmaM* and S*anatsujAtIyaM*. These commentaries have stood the test of time for more than a millenium and will so stand for several more millenia to come. Before the end of his life he had toured by foot the entire subcontinent three times and more, established several religious organizations called *mutts* -- of whom five are the most famous and are still carrying the torch ---, carried on verbal debates with almost 76 other schools of religious thought and brought them all under his banner of Advaita, left behind him scores of devotional poems, at least one for each deity or temple then known in India, wrote five unique expository works:

viveka cUDAmaNi, aparoksha anubhUti, Atma-bodha, upadeSa sAhasri and *praSnottara-ratna-mAlikA*,

each one of which constitutes, in its own way, a concise, encyclopaedia of *advaita* vedanta and, finally, reorganized and streamlined the daily worship of the individual Hindu in such a way that it has survived him for centuries till now. His immediate disciples whom he later nominated to lead the mutts he established were: *sureSvarAchArya (former name maNDana-miSra), hastAmalakAchArya, padmapAdAchArya (former name sAnandana)* and *toTakAchArya (former name giri).*

Shankara was also an acclaimed poet. His compositions both in prose and poetry excel even some of the greatest literary poets India has known. He was not only one of the deepest thinkers of the world but he also had the unique distinction of being very lucid in his expositions (both written and oral) of his thoughts. He was a profound and well-read scholar but was in addition a blessed saint who had the grace of God in all its fullness. He exhibited, even in his childhood, marvellous powers of spirituality and scholarship. He was already known for his genial disposition and kind heart. On one of these days when he was studying in his *Guru*kula, (the abode of the teacher where his disciples become resident students), he went to a poor brahmin's house, as was usual with all celibate students, to receive his *bhikSA*, the daily food offered as a service. The poverty stricken housewife was unable to give him anything substantial. She brought and gave him an *Amalaka* (a fruit of the *embylic myrobalan*) as a humble token of her contribution to the *bhikSA*. Shankara's heart was moved at the sight of her poverty on one side and her readiness, on the other side, to give away even the very little she had. He prayed to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth by composing his famous *kanaka-dhArA stotra*. Lo! and behold, her house was immediately filled with a heavenly downpour of gold in the form of golden *amalaka* fruits. Thus was born one of the most popular hymns of ancient India, which, even today is repeated very often by young and old for the obvious purpose of pleasing Goddess LakSmi for Her grce to descend and bestow wealth and prosperity. The poem containing 27 verses not only offers this prayer but it also describes the three deities *Sarasvati, LakSmi* and *DurgA* as manifestations of the one Mother Goddess.

Shankara was further a great mystic and Yogi who had a direct perception of the Infinite Consciousness and at the same time he was also a practical, socio-cum-religious reformer. To cap this all, his knowledge and felicity in law, logic, rules of grammar and etymology were as supreme as his devotion. Thus Shankara synthesized in his one

personality the superlatives of a philosopher, writer, thinker, poet, scholar, blessed devotee, mystic, reformer, humanist, lawyer and logician, and the beloved of the Lord. This unique combination of so many excellent achievements of his in his short life has not perhaps been paralleled by any one in the history of the world either before or after his time.

Ramanuja

Sri Ramanuja-AcArya (1017C.E. - 1137C.E.) was the first propagator of *viSishTAdvaita* philosophy on a national scale. His followers are known as *SrI vaishNavas*. He was the third *AcArya* (= Master, Teacher, *Guru*, Guide) in the succession of *SrI vaishNava AcAryas* beginning from *nAtha-muni* (9th century C.E.). While the *AlvArs* (See separate Section on Alvars later) represented the emotional side of Vaishnavism, the *AcAryas* who followed them represented the intellectual side. Natha-muni (825 –918 C.E.)was the foremost *AcArya* of the Vaishnavas. Natha-muni is said to have received by his yogic powers the divine hymns known as *prabandhams* straight from Nammalvar who lived centuries before him. He set the hymns to music wherever necessary and popularized them in private and public worship everywhere. After Natha-muni the responsibility of the spiritual leadership of the *SrI vaishNavas* fell on his grandson *YamunAcArya*, after a little gap. This *YamunAcArya* had renounced a kingship of the Pandya kingdom which came his way because of his scholarship and was spending his last days in the service of the lord Deity Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam. He wrote four basic works on *viSishTAdvaita* way of life. The teachings and vision of this *AcArya* greatly influenced his successors, particularly Ramanuja, the immediate successor whose ascent to the leadership is itself a miraculous story of the lineage .

Before *YamunAcArya* died he had the divine inspiration to call for Ramanuja and decree that the latter should fulfill his mission. By the time Ramanuja arrived on the scene the elder *AcArya* had already died. Ramanuja went near the dead body of the great preceptor and found that three fingers of the dead saint's right hand were folded and clenched; nobody around could explain the phenomenon. Ramanuja guessed by intuition that the clenched fingers represented his three aspirations and his message to himself (Ramanuja). He then gave out one after another three declarationsas if, it were a telepathic reading of the dead saint's wishes. It was nothing but spiritual telepathy! As he gave out these three declarations, the fingers of the dead saint relaxed and got straightened one by one! The declarations are:

1.Remaining in the *SrI vaishNava* fold I shall arrange for a commentary of Nammalvar*'s tiru-vai-mozhi* and then preach the doctrine of *prapatti* (self-surrender)

Ramanuja later fulfilled this by reading with his own disciples the *dravida-prabandha-mala* and giving them the d*ravida-veda* which made it equal in rank with the vedas.

2. I shall write an elaborate commentary on the Brahma *sUtras* and reveal the saving knowledge to posterity.

Ramanuja finished this great task around 1100 C.E. The work, called *Sri BhAshya* is a monumental work. It proves that lord Narayana with all auspicious attributes is the ultimate *Brahman*, and it is he who gives salvation to devotees in reward to their devotion, preserving their individuality even after salvation.

3. In honour and memory of the renowned *ParAsara* who produced the *Vishnu-purANa*, I shall leave behind a great VaishNava by that name.

This vow was fulfilled when Ramanuja gave that name *Parašara* to the son of *Kuresa* his foremost disciple and later installed him as his successor to the leadership of the Vaishnava community.

Thus was the torch of Vaishnavism passed on through the greatest telepathic miracle of all time!

Ramanuja was not only a great thinker but an equally great organizer. Before he embraced *sannyasa* and took the headship of the Vaishnavas at Srirangam he was a householder devotee but his wife's inability to enter the spirit of his spiritual leanings made him renounce that life. He spent two years in studying the teachings of Yamunacharya from the specialists who had been trained by him. Once when he learnt the most sacred *ashTAksharI* (= the eight-lettered) *mantra* from a scholar at Tirukkoshtiyur, he disclosed it to a large mass of people, inspite of the *Guru*'s injunctions of secrecy and punishment of Hell for violation. Ramanuja's defence was that if the knowledge of that *mantra* would help all those people go to the abode of Lord *Vishnu* after death he would welcome going to hell for disclosing it to them.Whether it is a question of interpretation of caste rules or a question of the relationship between husband and wife, father and son, teacher and disciple, the choice between what is *Dharma* and what is *aDharma* should be made, he would say, only on the basis of an absence or presence of an internal selfishness, and of the presence or absence of a deep devotion to the Lord, irrespective of what the secondary scriptures like Manu Smriti might say. He carried on this war against intellectual and religious arrogance and snobbery unceasingly throughout his life.

Ramanuja toured the whole country to popularize his teachings. Wherever he went he won over the controversialists there and established his own monasteries. He divided the Vaishnava world into several subdivisions and appointed spiritual leaders for each one of them from among the householder devotees who flocked to him. He arranged for the central apostolic succession of the spiritual leadership at the temple of Srirangam, which from now on became the headquarters of the Vaishnava world. He displayed towards all, and in particular, towards the lower classs, a unique compassion and sympathy and gave everybody a place in the Vaishnavite world by allowing them to wear the caste marks of Vaishnavism, to follow the Vaishnava customs and habits and to recite the Prabandhams.

The message that Ramanuja left for posterity and the world went home not only in his home, the heartland of South India, but in the entire country upto distant Kashmir. Many of the great medieval reformers of India drew inspiration from his teachings. He was the first to synthesize the teachings of the Vedas, Brahma-Sutras and the Gîtâ with those of the divine Prabandhams in Tamil. That the Lord is both the goal and the path was convincingly established by him as the core of the teaching in the vedanta of both

Sanskrit and Tamil. He revolutionized the thought processes of tradition-bound brahmins by preaching *mantras* and their meanings to seekers and devotees, irrespective of their caste. He was the foremost maker of modern Vaishnavism. His innovations in the rituals, practices, ideals and the norms of society were successful because, in the tradition of his two great predecessor-*AcAryas*, he combined the management of the Srirangam temple with the duties of the apostolic head of Vaishnavism. It is no wonder that today no Vaishnavite temple is considered complete without an image of his as the prince of devotees ever facing the Lord in His contemplation. Factions will forget their differences just at the mention of his name. His influence over all alike, brahmin or non-brahmin, southerner or northerner, poor or rich, the protagonist of Samskrit or of Tamil, is remarkable. It does not matter whether they adhere to his school of philosophy or not. Throughout the Hindu world, the attitude of a religious worship of a divinity or a *Guru* is in essence the one taught and followed by Ramanuja, namely the attitude of a servant to the master. -–of one of insignificance to one of infinite compassion, knowledge, power and grace.

JnAneSvar

JnAneSvar (1275 – 1296) was a great poetic genius and mystic saint of the Maharashtra region. He established the Bhagavata tradition in Maharashtra. His famous commentary in Marathi on the Gita is the most elaborate ever written. He also composed a series of short poems (Abhangas) in praise of the Lord of Pandharpur. His bhakti is pure and serene like the love of husband and wife, of Krishna and Rukmini.

The life-story of JnAneSvar is the most miraculous among all the biographies in historical memory. JnAneSvar's father Vittalpant changed over to Sannyasa-Asrama even before JnAneSvar was born. The Guru who initiated Vittalpant in Sannyasa at Varanasi came to Alandi (known as AlakApuri near modern Pune) on a pilgrimage and accidentally met JnAneSvar's wife Rukminibai and a conversation with her proved to him that Vittalpant's statement about nobody being alive to care for him was not the truth. So he took Rukminibai to Varanasi, ande convinced Vittalpant to get back to a householder's life with Rukmini and go back to Alandi. In fact he said that this was his orders as a Guru and that made Vittalpant obey him. But back at Alandi the local Brahmins would not accept this arrangement because according to them a brahmin cannot return from Sannyas to a householder status. So the couple lived away from the village almost as an outcaste. In due time they had three sons – Nivrittideva, JnAnadeva and Sopanadeva -- and one daughter, by name Muktabhai. JnaneSvar's biography in Bhaktavijayam says these three sons were respectively the manifestations of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma and the girl Muktabhai was the Avatara of Mother Goddess Herself.

It so happened when Nivrittideva was six years old he came under the influence of a Yogi who taught him Yoga as well as Brahma-jnAna. Nivrittideva in his turn taught Jnanadeva, who in turn taught it all to his younger brother and sister. But the parents did not know about this spiritual development of their divine offsprings. When the eldest son was eight, the parents requested the Brahmins of alandi to perform the Upanayanam ceremony for their sons. The Brahmins refused on the same account for which they had

earlier refused him admittance into the village. The helpless parents dropped the matter there and went over to Varanasi where they ended their lives. When the children asked the brahmins of alandi as to what their fate was now, they demanded a certification from the Brahmin community in the larger town of Paiton ('pratishtaan') on the banks of Godavari. The boys went there along with their sister and asked for help. When help was not forthcoming, the eldest boy Nivrittidev asked for a final solution for them to reach Salvation. The brahmins said they should keep going with the full conviction that everything and every living being is God Himself. On hearing this, Jnanadev said to his brother, "Well,, brother, this is sufficient for us; this will lead us to Moksha". The Brahmins were greatly surprised to hear this from this little boy, they asked for his name, and learning that it was 'Jnanadev' wondered how he got this great Vedantic name. And one of the brahmins said : 'What is there in a name? Even the buffalo grazing yonder might be given this name, but that would not beget it spiritual wisdom on that account!'. And Jnanadev replied: "Why doubt? The Sat-cid-Ananda Atman that is in me is also in that buffalo. So where is the difference?" The Brahmins were irked by this Vedantic talk of the little boy. "Would that buffalo speak like you?" provoked one brahmin. Lo and behold! Right in their presence Jnanadev made the buffalo spotlessly recite portions of Rigveda, Sama Veda and Yajurveda.

Some more miracles happened and that was how the Brahmins of Pratishtan were more than convinced that these boys were already spiritually blessed and so they don't need to have any more certification of their brahminhood.

On the way back to Alandi Jnanadev started explaining the Gita to those who walked with him along. Thus arose the monumental commentary called 'JnAneSvarI'. And the practice of 'nagara-sankIrtan', that is, walking along while singing Bhajans of Names of God also started then.

DeSika

Vedantadesika (1269 – 1370) is the second great name in Vaishnavism. The death of Ramanuja in 1137 C.E. was followed by a period of sectarian split among the Sri Vaishnavas. By the end of the 14th century this turned up into a permanent division into two sects: *Vadakalai* (northern learning) and *Tenkalai* (southern learning). The followers of the former consider Vedanta-Desika as their proponent-*AcArya*.

Tradition regards Vedanta-Desika as the incarnation of the *ghanTa* (= Bell) of the Lord of Tirupati. Born in Tuppil, near Kanchipuram, educated and trained by a scholarly uncle of his, he mastered all the known religious literature by age 20. Thereafter for more than 75 years he enriched the Vaishhnava world with his teachings and writings. He was a great teacher, expositor, debater, poet, philosopher, thinker and defender of the faith of Vaishnavism. His writings number more than a hundred. His works include: devotional works on deities and AcAryas, treatises on Višishtadvaita, commentary on the *Gita*, a gloss on the meanings of the vedas, works in Tamil and Samskrit reconciling the teachings of the Alwars and the *prasthAna-traya*, secret doctrines of Vaishnavism, original Tamil poems, epic poems and allegorical dramas in Samskrit, dalectical works

directed against rival schools, treatises on practical daily life and several other miscellaneous treatises. It is not surprising that Vedanta-Desika was called in his own time *kavi-tArkika-simha* (the lion of poets and philosophers) and *sarva-tantra-svatantra* (the master of all science and knowledge). Though the word *deSika* commonly means *AcArya* or *guru*, after Vedanta-desika's time, *deSika* stands only for *Vedanta-deSikAcArya*! His poems are great not only for their poetic sentiment but they also contain an incisive clarity of appeal that is instructive to the seeker as well as enjoyable by the connoisieur. In talking about the eight-lettered *mantra* of Narayana, he mentions several things which can also have an eight-fold classification – like, eight kinds of devotion, eight *siddhis,* eight functions of the intellect and so on. In the same strain he talks of eight flowers for the worship of God; these are:

Non-violence; sense-control; universal compassion; infinite patience; wisdom; austerity; meditation; and truth.

His explanations of the Transcendence and Immanence of God are very illuminating. Transcendence (= *bahir-vyApti*) means: He is there even where Matter and Spirit are not there. Immanence (= *antar-vyApti*) means: He is inherent in Matter and Spirit in such a way that you can never say He is not there. When he explains the theory of surrender (*prapatti*) he analyses the situation of man's sins vanishing after the surrender of Man. The sins acquired before surrender vanish at the point of surrender. Afterwards, sins done because of inevitability will not accrue to the doer. Sins done involuntarily or unconsciously certainly will not accrue to him. On the other hand, sins done consciously, in the sense they were not inevitable, will vanish in the following manner: one-fourth of them by a proper remorse; one-fourth by a determination not to repeat the sin; one-fourth by a preparation to do the regretful ritual of *prAyaScitta* and the last one-fourth by the actual doing of that ritual! The examples of Vedanta-desika's enjoyable poetry coupled with devotional fervour are too many to be exhausted. We shall just cite one. Here He speaks to God:

> Oh God! You are the Fullness because You have no blemish; You are the Bliss because You cleanse our sorrows.Myself You are, since You reside in me;You are mine all, since everything is yours!

Vedanta-desika's *pAdukA-sahasram* -- meaning one thousand verses on the sandals, is in praise of the sacred sandals on which the Lord's lotus feet rest. The whole work is a monument for supreme devotion and superb poetry, all in one night's intuition, - an overnight miracle of one thousand verses! It was done by him just as a fulfillment of a competition committed to as a challenge by his disciples who were provoked by members of the *tenkalai* school. It is full of beautiful poetry, of superb devotion, of conceptual density, of philosophy, of mythology, of poetic gymnastics, of lilting rhyme, of majesty of language and of what not. All this was composed by *deSika* (as he puts it, by the Grace of the *pAdukA* of the Divine) in just one quarter of the night, actually the third quarter. The earlier two quarters were devoted by him, as soon as he accepted the commitment, to *yoga and yoga-nidra* (=sleep induced by yoga and resulting in intuition). The opposite school kept awake the whole night and brought forth 300 of the 1000 promised, on the

lotus feet of the Lord. The spirit of the *pAduka-sahasraM* is unequalled in any religious literature. The *pAdukA* of the divine is equal to the *guru* or the *AcArya* whose grace is more powerful than the grace of the Lord. The AcArya implied in every verse of the *pAdukA* sahasram is Nammalvar, the great author of *tiru-vAi-mozhi*, who is generally considered as the *pAdukA*of the divine. Here are a few examples of this unusual eulogy of the *pAdukA*.

The Tamil word *perumAL* is used by Vaishnava tradition to denote the Supreme Divinity as well as the idol -- *arcA* -- of the Divine. The two words which compose to make *perumAL* are *perum*, which means 'the great' 'the gigantic' 'the supreme' and '*AL*' which means 'personality'. The corresponding Samskrit word is '*purushottama*'. The sandals of Perumal are known as the *SaThAri*. The *SaThAri* is like a crown placed reverentially on the heads of devotees who receive it with humility , and with one hand on the mouth as if to keep it shut. The classic instance of this act was first done by Bharata when he received the sandals of Lord Rama. But before he receives it, he requests the Lord to wear the sandals once and remove it. The act of Rama that is requested here is to step on the sandals and step down. This drama does not find a place in either the Tamil Ramayana of Kamban or the Hindi Ramayana of Tulsi. But the original poet Valmiki describes it. 'Oh Lord', says Bharata, 'Please step on these sandals and step down. These sandals are the ones which support and sustain the welfare of the three worlds'. And Rama obliges. Imagine this scene in your mind. What does it mean? Does it have an esoteric significance? The obvious significance that suggests itself to us is that Râma is requested to step on the sandals and step out so that the *pAdukA* may receive the spiritual vibrations from the Lord and therefore become sacred so as to be venerated and be able to receive the honour of being the object of worship from Bharata for the next fourteen years, the period of Râma's exile. This is what the great *AcArya*, Vedanta-desika, also thinks and weaves in his verse No.113 of his *pAdukA-sahasram*. But three verses later he eulogises the *pAdukA* to such heights that this scene of Rama's stepping on and stepping down from the sandals obtains an enormous significance, revealed only by the great intution of the super-devotee Vedanta desika. The why of that divine act as explained by the master-poet is wonderful.

The *pAdukAs* of the Divine are more powerful than the Divine itself. So when the Lord is on the point of embarking on a commitment to walk through the forests of the country for the next fourteen years, he was relying on the power of the *pAdukA* to protect him and his feet. Now that Bharata is asking for the *pAdukAs*, and that means separation from them, as far as Râma is concerned, He is now stepping up on them and stepping down so as to *receive* the spiritual vibrations from them and thereby the energy for him to sustain the challenge of walking barefooted through the entire forest. So the poet says: If he did not do it, how could he have walked through the rough ground and dense shrubbery of the Dandaka forest with bare feet for so long? Is this not the height of devotion to the divine *pAdukA* on the part of Desika?

The *pAdukA* is greater than even Vibhishana and Sugriva - says the poet in another verse.

> Oh wonderful sandals, You are certainly equal to Vibhishana and Sugriva in that all three of you support the divine feet of the Lord on your head; but you are even greater than them, since you were coronated first!

tulyepi devi raghuvIra padASrayatve
pUrvAabhishekam-abhigamya garIyasI tvaM;
tenaiva khalv-abhijAtam mani-pAdarakshe
rakshaH-plavaMgama-patI bhavatIM sva-mUrdhnA.
(Verse No.231)

You are even greater than Rama, continues the poet again:

> Oh sandals, You are even more glorious than Rama whose glory pervades all the three worlds. For, if not, how did Bharata, who wanted only Rama, accept you as security for Rama's return? (Is it not common knowledge that a thing accepted as security for money promised to be returned, must have a value greater than the money lent?)

padAvani prabhavato jagatAm trayANAM
rAmAdapi tvam-adhikA niyatam prabhAvAt;
no chet kathaM nu bharatasya tameva lipsoh
pratyAyanaM paripaNaM bhavatI bhavitrI
(Verse No.108)

Madhva

MadhvAchArya (1238 - 1317) belongs to the triumvirate of spiritual giants along with Shankara and Ramanuja, through whose expositions of Upanishadic philosophy India's spiritual greatness became famous and continues to be so, throughout the world. His original name was Vasudeva, while in religious circles he is known as Poorna-prajna, the fully enlightened. In his 37 treatises he signs himself as Ananda-tirtha. He is considered as an incarnation of the Wind-God, *vAyu*, also known as *mukhya-prANa*. He was born in a village near Udupi in Karnataka. Around the age of 25 he renounced worldly life. He was not only a scholar-Sannyasi but was also a giant in physical strength as well as in psychic powers. He studied the philosophy of advaita in the beginning but very soon was dissatisfied with the distance it keeps from reality.He started making his own interpretations of the scriptures. He used to declare that he remembered these ideas from his previous lives. His captivating powers of exposition, his originality and his untaught learning resulted in his being named as the head of the Monastery in which he was just a student. His philosophy is down-to-earth realism. He interprets the passage *tat-tvam-asi* as saying essentially that everything is under the direction and control of the Almighty, from whom we, the souls, are different. For this he invokes a vowel from the preceding word *AtmA* in the passage and reads it as *atat-tvam-asi*. He has written *bhAshyas* on the *brahma-sUtras*, the Upanishads and the *Gita*. It is said he mastered 21 rival traditions before he wrote all these. His *mahA-bhArata-tAtparya-nirnaya* (=the fixing of the purport of the *mahAbhArata*) is a poem of 32 chapters. He also wrote a gloss on the *SrImad-*

BhA.. He was probably the first one, chronologically, to use the *BhA.* systematically for philosophical expositions.

MadhvAchArya was an uncompromising theist. His devotion was coeval with knowledge and therefore more intellectual than emotional. His life was so full of miracles and miraculous devotion that we cannot separate his life from either his miracles or his devotion. The most unique of them all has a historical overtone. Once a ship while reaching the shore near Udupi faced a great storm and was in imminent danger. MadhwAchArya who was standing on the seashore, saw the scene, waved his cloth towards the ship and by the Grace of God the ship was saved. The first thing the captain did on landing was to prostrate himself before the AcArya and thank him for what he believed was the AcArya's miracle and request him to take something as gift. The AcArya by his inner vision saw a heavy lump of *gopi-candana* (a species of white clay) lying in the ship as ballast. He asked for that to be given him as gift. Surprised at this seemingly trivial request the captain obliged. The AcArya drove his hand inside the lump of clay and brought forth a *sAligRama* stone idol of Balakrishna (Krishna in his childhood) from within. The idol was so heavy that the very fact that the AcArya could carry it all by himself was itself a miracle. But more miraculous was the information he gave on the idol. It appears it was originally made by the divine ar*chit*ect *viSva-karma* and was kept by no less a person than Rukmini hrself in Dwaraka in the *dvApara yuga*. When Dwaraka was submerged in the sea at the end of Krishna's time, the idol was lost. That was the idol which the AcArya had unearthed! It adorns the temple of Udupi even today.

The end of MadhvAchArya's life was equally miraculous as was his life. It is said that when he had completed his mission on Earth the heavenly beings showered flowers on him and under the cover of these flowers heaped on him, his body simply disappeared!

Appaiya Dikshidar

From the sapta rishis downward, there have been great (i.e.,spiritually great) house-holders in the Indian tradition. One such was Shri Appaiya Dikshidar (1520 – 1593 C.E.) hailing from Tamilnadu. As the true advaitin that he was, he saw no differences in the different manifestations of the Supreme Absolute. Stemming the tide of Vaishnavite attacks on Saivism during the one century prior to his times, one of his missions in life turned out to be a reconciliation of creeds, cults and philosophy. He did not think that rival interpretations of the vedas and puranas were entirely in the wrong. He says: ` na sUtrANAm arthAntaram-api bhavad-varyam-ucitaM' (Who can prevent different interpretations when the sUtras themselves are capable of different meanings?). He was so firm in his belief in advaita that he had no qualms in using his talent to the elucidation of other schools of thought like those of Vedanta-desikacharya of whom he was an admirer. Such was his tolerance in religious beliefs and his ardent desire for the reconciliation of philosophic thoughts. He wrote the `Chatur-mata-sara' to illustrate the philosophical thoughts of the four prominent schools of interpretation of Brahmasutras. The `Naya-manjari' deals with advaita, the `Naya-mani- mala' with Srikanta mata, the `Naya-mayukha-malika' with Ramanuja's philosophy and the `Naya-muktavali' with

Madhva's philosophy. His remarkable catholicity of outlook, his thoroughness in writing, his impartiality, his unerring sense of values and his passionate search for truth are all so evident in these writings that the Vaishnavas have adopted the `Naya-Mayukha-Malika' as their manual for their careful and reverent study and the Madhvas the `Naya-Muktavali'.

Having mastered, at a very early age, all the knowledge available at the time in philosophy, rhetoric and literature, he wrote as many as 104 works, large and and small, of which only 60 are now extant, in philosophy, devotional poetry and literary and philsophical criticism. His poetical talent is transparent in all these works. Only 60 of these works are extant now. These include works on Vedanta, Siva-advaita, Mimamsa, Vyakarana, Kavya vyakhyana, Alankara and Devotional poetry. He was well read in every branch of Samskrit learning. By conviction he was an advaitin and true worship of Lord Siva was the religion of his heart. Though the followers of the Siva-advaita school claim him as belonging to their school, it is not so easy to determine whether he was more inclined to Sivadavaita or advaita. Sivadvaita is very much akin to vishishhtadvaita of Ramanuja, except for the role of Vishnu being taken by Shiva.

Among the Vedantic works of Appayya Dikshitar, the `Siddhanta-lesha-sangraha' is most famous. In this elaborate and original treatise, he brings together in one place, all different dialectical thinking belonging to the advaitic school. Traditional students of Vedanta begin their study of Bhashyas only after studying this Siddhanta Lesha sangraha. All the different views of different subschools of advaita, like those of `eka-jiva-vada', `nana-jiva-vada', `bimba- pratibimba vada' `sakshitva-vada' etc. are all discussed and the contrary views properly explained in this work with Appayya Dikshidar's masterly touch. And in his characteristic eclectic style, he answers the question "How can there be contradictory views among the advaita acharyas themselves on the same point?" He says: All the acharyas agree in affirming the unity of the soul and the unreality of the phenomenal world. For the world of fiction different explanations are given according to the ingenuity of each acharya. What if different explanations are given for a mere fiction? !

Another famous Vedantic work of Appayya Dikshitar is the commentary known as the `Parimala'. It is an extremely readable commentary on the very difficult commentary called Kalpataru by an advaitic teacher named Amalananda. That Kalpataru is itself a commentary on Bhamati by Sri Vacaspati Misra which in turn is the famous commentary on the Sutra-Bhashya of Sri Sankara.

While the Parimala follows the advaitic approach, Appayya Dikshidar has written another commentary `Sivaarka-mani-deepika' on the Brahmasutras. But this is written from the point of view of Siva- visishtadvaita.. These two works – Sivaarka-mani-deepika and Parimala – are his magnum opus both in bulk and importance. Though both are commentaries on the Brahma sutra, Parimala aligns itself to the advaitic interpretation while the other work expounds the Sivadvaita philosophy of Srikanta-acharya. Appayya Dikshidar's patron, King Chinna Bomma Nayak of Vellore made endowments for the maintenance of a college of 500 scholars who studied Sivaarka mani Dipika under Sri

Dikshidar himself, thus equipping themselves for the Saivite propaganda work, which had been organised with a view to stemming the tide of Vaishnavite attacks and encroachments.

Dikshidar threw himself heart and soul into this mission for several years and often had to face grave personal danger, which he did with courage and faith. He preached, organised and wrote incessantly, enlisting the cooperation of several enlightened monarchs. He was the guiding spirit of a movement in which he organized the services of a large band of volunteers who could disseminate among the masses the philosophy of *advaita* and the worship of Lord *Shiva*. He undertook frequent travels and challenged his adversaries to open disputation, as was the custom of those days. He brought to bear on his widespread activities, his resourceful personality and created an atmosphere of tolerance and goodwill, in the place of the prevailing antipathies and narrow-mindedness.

Dikshidar graphically describes dvaita as the lowest step, vishishtadvaita as the middle step and sivadvaita and advaita which are very close to each other as the highest steps. He makes it clear in his work that Srikantha-Bhashya on the Brahmasutra has been written in very close approximation to the trend of thought of Sri Sankara in his own bhashya. Srikanta, according to Dikshidar, propagated his cult on the understanding that sagunopasana is only the first step to nirgunopasana, and that it was the real intention of Srikanta that the final truth lies only in Shuddhadvaita. Dikshidar's great dialectical skill is fully reflected in the work called Anandalahari chandrika, where he tries to narrow down the differences between the apparently divergent schools of thought and tries to show that the advaita of Sankara is the real eternal truth to which all others try to approximate.

In addition to his poetic skills and achievements on the philosophical propagations and Saivite missionary work, Dikshidar was a great Siddha-yogi. One of his yogic experiments was as great as it was thrilling. In the later years of his life, he was subject to attacks of colic pain. He was convinced that it was due to his Prarabdha and past karma. Whenever he wanted to meditate deeply or worship the Almighty, he made a bundle of his towel and put it in front of him. By his yogic power he transferred his melody to the towel and sat in meditation. His disciples watched the towel jumping about the place. To them he explained later that he transferred his ailment which was in the form of an evil spirit to the cloth and then took it back soon after his meditation was over!

About his mystic devotion,there is another thrilling story that is related to his work called Atmarpana-stuti. In this small work of fifty stanzas he makes the inner self melt as it were by his exquisite mystic poetry. We can see here the profound maturity of true devotion to the Supreme. It reflects the inner mental state of a great devotee, in whom the ego has become fully distinct. There is a traditional account of how this work came to be written. It appears once he wanted to test the maturity of his own devotion to the Lord. Hence he swallowed the juice of the `datura' fruit, which introduces intoxication, and told his disciples that they should write down whatever he says, during the stage when his consciousness was disturbed. In the stage of inebriation generally all suppressed ideas

would find release and come out into the open. And in his case it was the Atmarpana-stuti that came out! It is therefore also called `Unmatta-panchasati'.

Dikshidar is said to have travelled widely in the manner of those days, entering into philo-sophical disputations and controversaries in many centres of learning. He had the rare good fortune of being revered and patronised in his own life-time by kings of Vellore, Tanjore, Vijayanagar and Venkatagiri. A mighty intellect and peerless sage, he led a life of karma, bhakti and jnana – a model for posterity to follow.

Raghavendra

Sri Raghavendra (1595 – 1671 C.E.) has a unique place in the lineage of Masters, because He is said to be still living in his '*samAdhi*' at Mantralayam on the banks of the Tunga-bhadra river in South India. He voluntarily entered this *samAdhi* in 1671 C.E. and his disciples, on his orders built the structure of the samAdhi over his seated posture from which he left the mortal frame by his own will. He has declared that he will 'live' in this *samAdhi*' for 700 years. It was God's Will it seems that *Sanku-karNa* a close attendant-devotee of Lord Brahma the Creator Himself should be born repeatedly in this earthly world and be a great spiritual leader of humanity. Mantralaya was chosen by the Master as the right spot because the great devotee Prahlada had performed several ritual sacrifices here which makes the spot very auspicious. Also it was the same spot where Lord Rama once sat down in his historic wanderings through the forest .

The celestial *Sanku-karNa* was first born as Prahlada (in the very first *manvantara*), again as *VibhIshaNa* (Ravana's brother) in Rama's time and again as *vyAsa-tIrtha*, the spiritual leader of the *madhwa* school in the 15th century C.E. This leader was the twelfth Pontiff of the Dvaita mutt known by his name. His contributions to the dvaita culture and philosophy and to the growth of the dvaita mutt were many. He establsihed 732 idols of Hanuman all over India. He was the *guru* of the Vijayanagara kings. He wrote valuable commentaries and propagated the madhwa philosophy very successfully. He initiated the gret devotee Purandara-dasa who was himself an Avatara of Narada the divine sage.

Then came the *Avatara* of Sri Raghavendra. Even as a youth Sri Raghavendra then known as Venkatanatha was not interested in worldly pursuits or a married life. The Goddess of Learning appeared before him in person and guided him to decide to throw away his worldly ties, his wife, his kith and kin, and adopt the ochre robe, which is what his own mind wanted. What followed was a long life of renunciation and dedication, ornamented by scores of miracles, several of which have been documented. He wrote more than forty works bearing on the teachings of Madhwa and the dvaita philosophy

In this *Avatara* Raghavendra captured the imagination of millions through his scholarship, devotion, spirituality, the divine qualities of infinite grace and compassion and his mystical powers of perception and action. It is said that his accumulated merit (= *puNya*) is so vast that as an enlightened soul he himself has no use for them. In his infinite compassion he lives still in his *samAdhi* and dispenses this vast store of *puNya* to those who care to visit his *samAdhi* or to worship Him and seek His grace. In fact this is

the way he says he is helping his favourite God zri-Rama by relieving Him of His burden of removing the miseries of devotees, so that in the long run the devotees may ask from the Lord SrI Rama for the *moksha* that He alone can bestow. That is why He is thought of as the wish-yielding heavenly tree (= *kalpa-vRkSa*) or the divine Cow *kAma-dhenu* which both can bestow on you anything you want, just the moment it is wished. This thought is inbuilt into the following classical prayer traditionally addressed to Sri Raghavendra.

pUjyAya raghavendrAya satya-Dharma-ratAya ca /
bhajatAm kalpavRkshAya namatAm kAmadhenave //

The words *satya-Dharma-ratAya ca* are significant here. Truth (*satya*) and righteousness (Dharma) are the two pillars on which the entire Hindu philosophy and religion stand. And of the two *satya* is more fundamental and is the one foundation for everything. *satya* has the top priority in Hindu Dharma. It is independent of caste, creed, status of life, profession, tradition, lineage, race or sex. All other *Dharmas* are dependent on *satya*. So the Ultimate is addressed as *satya-Dharma* in the final prayer contained in verse 15 of I.U.: *The face of Reality is hidden by the golden container. Reveal it, O Sun, so that I may visualise the Dharma of the Self as Truth.* :

hiraNmayena pAtreNa satyasyApihitam mukham /
tat tvam pUshan apAvRNu satya-dharmAya dRshTaye //

The Sun is the only physically visible representative of the Supreme Truth, Divine Light, *Brahman*, in this earthly world - if we cannot see or visualise the whole universe as *Brahman* itself. He is the One therefore, who illuminates us from within. Our limited consciousness has to open up to the Infinite Consciousness represented by the Sun. The allegory of the golden container in the above passage is full of meaning. The sanskrit word *pAtra* is derived from the definition: *pIyate anena iti pAtram* -- that by which we 'drink', i.e., experience. We experience the good and bad results of our past *karma* from this reservoir of our *samskAra* (store of cultural imprints in the mind) which brings forth our cycle of births and deaths.There are three seeds for this sprouting forth of our *samskAra*s and *vAsanA*s. The three are: Light (*cit*), Existence (*sat*) and Love (*Ananda*). They respectively activate, our Intelligence from its state of ignorance and inertness, our Life (i.e., birth and death) from its state of formless subtlety and our Mind from its states of love and hate. These activations express themselves in our wish to know, our wish to live, and our wish to enjoy -- these three being in turn sustained by one's father through knowledge, one's mother through food, and one's spouse through pleasure and companionship. (For more on this see the section on Three fundamental urges in Chapter 2). This then is the whole cycle of our *samsAra*. The reservoir for all this is the golden container representing the reservoir of all our *vAsanAs*.The creator, *BrahmA*, through whom this blossoms in the world as Life, is called *HiraNya-garbha* (Golden Conception) in this charge of His. So the rays of the Sun which are golden in colour and which constitute the blinding factor for not allowing us to see the Sun, the Reality, constitute, as it were, the golden container of our *vAsanAs*. The only Seer is the *HiraNya-garbha* who sees it all through. Our individuality, our names and forms, our inner organ of mind with all its ramifications, its accessories in the form of our sense organs -- all these are created by this *HiraNya-garbha*, who gives the Light to all of them. He is therefore the *savitA*,

the Sun. So we ask Him, plead with him and request him to remove the blinding rays from himself, because the seeds of our *samskAras* are with him, so that we can see Him as He really is. He is the One who can make us transcend our individuality and make us see the Oneness of Spirit within. This vision of the *Dharma* of the Self as Truth is Sri Raghavendra.

Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sai Baba of Shirdi (? - 1917) did not write any books. All that is available to us is records of a number of conversations between him and his devotees preserved in various biographical accounts. The following is a conversation which a devotee, Nana Govind Chandorkar, a Deputy Collector who was a traditionally well read orthodox person, had with Sai Baba. It is an English translation (by this author) of pp.69-73 of Shirdi Sai Baba: *kaN kaNDa deivam* (in Tamil) published by All India Sai Samajam, Mylapore, Madras, 1969. The selection does not purport to be a comprehensive sample of what Sai Baba did or preached. But it certainly carries the flavour of the Master that was Sai Baba, though of course, part of the original flavour must have been missed in the translation.

Nana: Baba, I am fed up with this *saMsAra*. It is only nissAra (thast without content). Please help me cut the bonds which bind me to it. What appears as pleasant in the beginning ends in misery. Fate tosses us hither and thither. I don't see an iota of happiness in this *saMsAra.*

Baba: Nana, you are prattling like a mad man. What you say is only partially true. You have misunderstood the truth. The *saMsAra* will exist as long as the body exists. No one can escape from it. How can you? Even I am under its clutches. The *saMsAra* is varied and different. It is the work of Desire and Anger. All the vagaries of the mind and the body constitute *saMsAra*. By running away and hiding yourself in a forest you cannot escape it. What you are now has been brought on you by yourself. You are only experiencing the fruits of your actions done by you in your previous lives. It is by that cause the effect of the appearance of this body has taken place. This is called *deha-prArabdha*. The soul gets a body just to experience the consequences of actions of its own previous lives. Without experiencing the consequences of *prArabdha karma* one cannot leave this world. Why do people look different? Why, in fact, do various living beings look different? It is all because of the *karma* of previous lives. A rich man's dog rolls in joy on a cushioned sofa. A poor man's dog rots at the street corner. The difference is because of *prArabdha.*

Nana: Since pleasure and pain do any way alternate in this *samsAra*, one feels like hating it and renouncing it. Is it not good to renounce?

Baba: Pleasure and pain are both *mAyA*. What appears as pleasant is not really a pleasure. People in the clutches of *samsAra* take the appearance of plesure as real pleasure and are drawn towards it. As a result of *prArabdha karma* one fellow gets tasty, dainty and rich food while another felllow has onoly stale bread to eat. The former thinks that he has no wants and the latter thinks he is a failure. Think well. Whatever you may eat, the result is

the same. Appeasement of one's hunger. One fellow covers his body with costly cloth with zari and all. Another does the same with a torn old rag. Both serve the same purpose. Pleasure and pain depend on the attitude of your mind. This is the effect of *mAyA*. Do not give place in your mind to thoughts of pleasure and pain.

mAyA manifests itself as the six enemies of Man.: Lust, Anger, Greed, Delusion, Pride and Envy. They make non-real things appear as real. A poor man, seeing the rich man wearing a gold ornament, wishes to have one like that for himself. This is greed. The others are similar to this. Conquer all six of these foes of Man. No desire will then rise in the mind. Otherwise you will become a slave of these six rogues. Use your discretion and kill them. You will not be affected by pleasure and pain caused by *mAyA*.

Let me tell you how you should go about in this *samsAra*. A wise person will be content with whatever he has, knowing full well that it is his *prArabdha*. If you have riches, be humble. A tree with more fruits in it will bend. But do not bend before all. One should certainly be firm and stern with wicked people. But with *sAdhus* and the devout, you should show humility and modesty.

Spend your wealth in charity and Dharma. But do not be extravagant. This body is certainly impermanent but so long as it is there, wealth is necessary to a certain extent. Even bile is necessary for the health of the body. But do not become greedy as money is the be-all and end-all of life. Be charitable. But do not do wasteful expenditure.

Observe happily all the goings-on in the world. Do not forget God. Remember always: 'This *samsAra* is not mine, it is God's.' Show your sympathy with the poor and the down-trodden. Do not hurt them by showing hate or disgust. Keep a constant mental analysis of the question: 'Who am I?'

Nana: Baba, Who is God? How will He look? Where is He? How can we see Him?

Baba: Those who toil in *samsAra* neither understand what is right and wrong nor do they comprehen the nature of God. Pure thoughts are absent in them. Constantly being immersed in the ocean of *samsAra* they do not have faith in devotion or in the scriptures. They don't reach God. They go towards hell.

On the other hand those who are eager to rise higher towards salvation, discard this state of bondage and begin to enquire wiuth discretion and intelligence. They are always itching to see God. They develop *bhakti* towards Him and observe the laws of the scriptures. They adopt *nAma-japa* and *dhyAna* and become a *sAdhaka* (an aspirant to reach God). They continuously move with the devout. When they reach a mature stage in their japa and dhyAna they become saintly. In that stage God and Man are alike. Praise and blame are one and the same for them. Desires have left them. The thought of 'I' and 'Mine' are not any more there. They begin to see that their own *AtmA* and God are the same. They realize 'I am *Brahman*".

Observe how each one of them has reached God. You will yourself then understand that God permeates all animate and inanimate objects in the world.

God is everywhere. There is no place where He is not. What prevents us from seeing Him is the power of *mAyA*. I, you, this world, all are part of *ISvara*. Therefore no one should hate another. Never forget that the Lord is everywhere. That will generate Love in you. When love overflows, everything is obtained.

Ramakrishna

To attempt to say something briefly of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836 – 1886), The Master, when the whole world is full of His message, through His Messiah Swami Vivekananda, and the Mission which bears the Master's name, is, to say the least, itself a formidable task. However we shall draw the attention of the reader to the following small note on Ramakrishna, already incorporated in the book on Science and Spriituality:

Ramakrishna, the prophet of the modern age, was no scholar but only a man of superlative faith and infinite conviction. From him came the authentic proclamation to the entire world that what lies behind the various religions of the world is a single Reality. Without any sophisticated education, he was able to influence the greatest intellectuals of his time, even the most westernized in their thought process. Coming in the direct line of Chaitanya, he would frequently pass into ecstasy, even at the mention of God's name by somebody in his presence. What is most important for all humanity is the inexhaustible fund of conversation with him that his disciples have preserved for us, through which, by suitable parables and allegories, he explains the most abstruse truths of the complex religion that is Hinduism and its central cord of unity with other faiths, of which he had personal experience through experimentation. He represented all the facets of Hindu religion and philosophy in his own person. His life itself was a unique synthesis of all higher thinking in the spiritual levels of the world. He is the gift of Hinduism to posterity.

Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo (1872 - 1950), the greatest exponent of the integral spiritual ideal taught in the Rgveda, the early Upanishads and the *Gita*. Is the author of the *magnum opus* of twentieth century Hindu spiritual writing, called 'The Life Divine' and of the poetic counterpart of this, called '*Savitri*', a poem twice as long as *Paradise Lost*. In these and in his numerous other writings he teaches a profoundly spiritual process called Integral Yoga. He has left innumerable records of his mystic experimentations which surpass the grandest sophistications that modern science and mathematics can muster. The *ASram* that he founded at Pondicherry has an international following and was guided by The Mother (1878 - 1973) ever since Aurobindo made himself unavailable for direct public interaction.

Ramana

Ramana Maharishi (1879 –1950): When he was hardly thirteen even before anybody could tell him that the soul was immortal, Ramana had discovered the fact for himself through inner enlightenment. The boy became a saint then and there. He renounced home and spent fifteen long years in deep meditation on the Arunachala Hills, in Tiruvannamalai, Tamilnadu, India. He had become a *mahaRshi*. Disciples came one by one and the Ramana *ASram* grew into a major centre of meditation, learning and training in spirituality. With his tremendous faith in the universal brotherhood of man and the need to attain spirituality by constant questioning of one's own self, the *mahaRshi* spread the message of transitoriness of the material and visible world and the divine bliss that is inherent in every being -- by his preachings, certainly, but even more by his silent transmission of spirituality to those who had the good fortune to sit before him and yearn for that message. He may be taken as the greatest devotee of that formless *Brahman* of which we all are so curious to know more but so incapable of understanding. He is considered by his disciples to have been an *Avatara* of Lord *subrahmaNya*. He is one of the spiritual triumvirate of the first half of the twentieth century who left an indelible imprint on the common psyche of India– the other two being Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. There may not be a single Indian of the twentieth century who has not been impressed and or influenced by at least one of these three towering spiritual giants.

Kanchi Mahaswamigal

Kanchi maha-swamigal, (1884 - 1994). His Holiness Sri Chandrasekhara Saraswati Swamigal has been acclaimed by the whole world as a fully realized soul. In his days of the headship of the Kanchi Mutt, he lectured to thousands of audiences in his inimitable simple style, coupled with a great depth of ideas. Here is one extract on the topic 'Why *bhakti*?': (The extract is from *aRuL vAkku* - in Tamil, by Sri Chandrasekharendra saraswati swamigal of Kanchi, published by Balaravi & Co. Madras, 1974, pp.10, 11 - Translation into English, by this author)

Every cause has an effect. The entire discipline of science is about the laws of cause and effect. The universe swings in its routine governed by these unchangeable laws. Because of the presence of a Super Intelligence everything follows in its natural law and life goes on in the external world. If there is such an irrevocable chain of cause and effect in the science of the external world there must be one such in the internal world of human life also. Whatever we may do, there must be a consequence, a result,. If we do good, good must ensue. If we do the opposite, bad results must accrue. The Universal Agent which dispenses the effect for the cause is called the Supreme Power (*mahA Shakti*, *ISvara, bhagavAn, svAmi*, God).

As long as there is a mind, so long will it keep wavering. Along with good it will also think of evil. Along with *puNya karma* it will also keep doing sinful *karma*. As a consequence of this sin, we will be dispensed sorrow and misery by the Dispenser of Results (*phala-dAta*). People generally pray to Him for the removal of their sorrows. They think this is *bhakti*. If *ISvara* wills it, he may even waive the sorrows earned by us

by our sins. But we have no right to ask Him to do so. Even if sorrows come, let Him grant us the attitude of mind which will keep us indifferent and unperturbed by these sorrows – that is the prayer which is desirable. But even this prayer is not the full-fledged *bhakti*.

Even telling God of our sorrows is tantamount to thinking that He is not aware of them. In other words we are truncating His omniscience. 'Oh God, remove this difficulty for me, remove that sorrow for me,. Or at least change my attitude towards them so that they do not upset my equanimity' –when we pray like this to God, we presume that God has to be told what we want so that He may come to our rescue. This again truncates the quality of God known as *avyAja-karuNA* – He showers Grace without reason, without being prompted. *bhakti* is not true *bhakti* as long as it underrates the omniscience of God, or His Grace. However, even this kind of prayer does, though temporarily, lighten the heaviness of our hearts and there is some taste of mental peace. It is good to the extent that we adopt an attitude of humility towards God and entreat His succour, renouncing the arrogance of the thought that we can ourselves accomplish everything.

'O God, whichever way you show me, that is acceptable to me.' This kind of surrender to God is complete *bhakti*. If there is nothing left for ourselves then all the blemishes and dirt of the mind will disappear and the mind will become pure and clear like crystal.

There is another major reason why we should follow the path of *bhakti*. There is no pleasure in life if we cannot exhibit Love or *premA*. It is a common experience that there is no greater delight than Love. But the fact is, in whatsoever object or person we place our love, one day or other we get separated from the object of our love because either something happens to us or something happens to the object of our love. And from that moment what was once a source of happiness becomes a source of sorrow. The only object which will never get separated from us is God. If only we make Him the object of our Love!. Then there will be no end to the happiness we can gain. That happiness will be everlasting. When this love matures into Supreme Love of God, we can see the entire world of Himself. It is *bhakti* that helps us avoid the pitfall of a wasteful, loveless human life.

By *bhakti* one can eradicate one's miseries step by step; ennoble one's mental attitude; rid oneself of mental slush; focus one's turbulent mind; obtain the pleasant attributes of God; and gain the unceasing happiness of Infinite Love. Throwing away all attachment to transient things, if we surrender to that Ultimate Dispenser of *kArmic* effects He will lift us above the level of the *kArmic* Universe and eventually carry us on the stage of *moksha*. These are the many reasons why one should be a devotee of God.

4. Shankara's Message of One-ness

The scriptures are innumerable; the things to be known are many; the time at our disposal is short; the obstacles are too many. **It is therefore important to grasp the essence and essence only. It is in this sense that we should approach the message of one-ness taught by the Advaita school led by Shankara.** The philosophy that Shankara

propagated was not his own. It was already in the Upanishads. What he did was to focus his searchlight on it and prove to us that it was the central and only teaching of the Upanishads as well as their collective last word. But the ordinary layman who remembers Shankara now does not know enough about him or his philosophy to understand him well. The only thing he can say is that Shankara taught about *mAyA* or illusion. 'Illusion' is a wrong translation of *mAyA*. By translating *mAyA* as illusion we have done the greatest disservice to Shankara. It is not being said that the world does not exist. It is only being said that the world is an appearance, not totally real. Shankara distinguishes three orders of reality. The Absolute Reality, that is *Brahman* and *Brahman* alone. The complete unreality, like the horns of a hare, or like squaring the circle if one wants to use the modern scientific language. In between these two extremes there is a phenomenal reality which is like the apparent reality of the dream world. **A dream is neither real nor unreal. It is real to the person who dreams. It is unreal to the same person after he wakes up from the dream. This is the most important point. A dream is not a dream or illusion to the dreamer. So long as we dream, so long as we are seeing only the plurality of this mundane world, it is as real to us as the dream is to the dreamer. The world is unreal only to the seer who has waken up to the reality of the Absolute -- like a Ramana Maharishi or a Sada*Shiva* Brahmendra.** For them the only real thing is the Absolute *Brahman*. What they see before them is also *Brahman*. They see *Brahman* everywhere. So the world has not vanished absolutely. The world has vanished from their point of view. So if they keep on telling you that the world is an illusion or *mithyA*, it is like someone appearing in your dream and telling you, you better wake up from the dream and wake up to the reality. We are so much engrossed in our dream that we are not prepared to listen to the advice of the *guru* or the Upanishads or to Shankara. Thus between the formless and nameless Absolute which is the Ultimate Reality and the total unreality of non-existence, there is the intermediary apparent reality of this phenomenal world -- which appears to be real but is not absolutely real. This appearance of the world as a reality has been given several analogies by philosophers. **The most telling example of this is that of a rope appearing in twilight as a snake. The snake was never there. Even when the snake was being seen there was only the rope. The rope appeared as the snake. So also *Brahman* appears to us as the world. Even when the world is being seen it is *Brahman* that is being seen as the world. This the seers do know and so what they see is not the world but *Brahman***. One may object to this analogy as follows. I realise that there was no snake. So the rope no more appears to me., So also I realise that there is only *Brahman* and there is no reality of the world. But still the world is appearing to me. For this Ramana Maharishi asks you to go the example of the mirage. The water in the mirage is only an illusion. I see the water in the mirage. I go near it and realise that there is no water. But once I come back I see there is again the appearance of the water. This analogy is to tell you that how even after realisation, the illusion may still appear as real.

Let us accept that **any analogy has its own limitation**. The analogies have to be taken only to that extent where we do not overdo it. Once the point of the analogy is made, there is no use in continuing the analogy. Thus here the objection is raised as follows. The water of the mirage does not quench my thirst, but in this supposedly unreal world, I have my thirst, hunger etc. and all these are quenched by the happenings in this world.

For this Ramana asks you to look at the analogy of the dream. Within the dream you may have thirst, and it may be quenched by the water in the dream; so also hunger. Dream analogy is a great blessing. What else is a dream for? Nobody knows. In God's creation, the value of a dream seems to be only this. To tell you how unreal is the world. Without the dream analogy it is impossible even to mentally conceive of the possible unreality of the phenomenal world from a different point of view, namely the absolute point of view. A dreamer wakes up usually only when something unpleasant happens within his dream. No dreamer ends up his dream while still in the happy state, except when an external force acts. This is because man's natural state is happiness. Realising one's natural state of happiness is *moksha*, according to Shankara. By a complete absorption of the body, mind and intellect in this eternal state of knowledge and happiness is what is called realisation of one's self. **In order to do this one has not to chase it or do anything else, says Shankara. The removal of Ignorance is the only thing to be done. Automatically our natural state will be realised.**

So what are we supposed to do at all? Shankara says: Do an introspection and investigate about your self starting the probing from a ruthless analysis of your own mind and its vagaries. Try to get away from *its* external occupations and make it preoccupied with questions like; What is making the mind think? What is really behind it? Who is the thinker? Why are you not able to control the mind? What is more permanent than the mind? Wherefrom does the mind derive its strength? Besides the physical brain where the external hardware processes the thoughts of the mind, what is the software that forms the source for all the vibrations of the mind? Whence does it spring forth? Who is operating this software? If the answer comes up saying that it is *you* who are operating the software, then is that 'you' different from the 'you' which stands behind, watching the mind? Can you watch the mind unperturbed by any of its goings-on? In that sense can you still the mind? Now who is this 'you'? Shankara and all the other exponents of advaita plead with us to keep on asking these questions and try to get convincing answers within oneself from oneself. Certainly they also ask us to go to a teacher. But a teacher can only point the way. The final analysis has to be done by oneself on oneself. Seers have declared emphatically that the quality and intensity of the internal struggle to get at these answers differ from person to person and it depends upon one's stage of spiritual evolution and the struggle he has already put in through all his various lives.

The person who is already spiritually ripe because of his earlier *vAsanA*, will probably get the enlightenment just by one listening to the teaching from the *guru*. But for the rest of us who are still far below this stage, Shankara says: Occupy your mind with God rather than with such secular pursuits as learning the gymnastics of rules of grammar :

bhaja GovindaM bhaja GovindaM GovindaM bhaja mUDhamate /
saMprApte sannihite kAle na hi na hi rakshati dukRngkaraNe //

Seek the company of the good. Through the company of the good (***Sanskrit : 'sat-sangam'***) there arises non-attachment; through non-attachment, there arises freedom from delusion; through delusionlessness, there arises steadfastness; through steadfastness, there arises liberation in life:

satsangatve nissangatvaM nissangatve nirmohatvaM /
nirmohatve nizcalatatvaM nizcalitatve jIvanmuktiH //

In this context, it is important to note that, throughout the length and breadth of India, and through all the centuries, the concept of ***sat-sanga*** has been emphasized in every scripture and almost every literary work, that one cannot miss to note it as the sine-qua-non for spiritual uplift. Listen to the noblest of the noble souls, Tulsi from his Ram-charita-mAnas:

Jal char thalachar nabhchar nAnA
je jaD cetan jIv jahAnA /
mati kIrati gati bhUti bhalAyI
jab jehi jatan jahAn jahi pAyI/
so jAnab sat-sant prabhAu
ko kahUm bed na An upAU /

Of the various creatures, both animate and inanimate, living in this world, whether in water or on land or in the air, whoever has ever attained wisdom, glory, salvation, material prosperity or welfare anywhere and by any means whatsoever, know it to be the result of association with holy men; there is no other means either in this world or in the Vedas.

Continues Shankara in his Bhaja-Govindam:

Do not be proud of wealth, kith and kin, and youth; Time takes away all these in a jiffy. Leaving aside this entire world which is transitory, and knowing the state of brahman, enter into it.

mA kuru dhana-jana-yauvana-garvaM harati nimeSAt-kAlas-sarvaM /
mAyA-mayam-idam-akhilaM hitvA Brahma-padaM tvam praviza viditvA //

Sing the song of the *Gita*. Recite and revel in the one thousand names of *Vishnu*. Meditate on the form of the Goddess. Take the mind into the company of the good. Distribute wealth among the needy. Be devoted completed to the lotus-feet of the Master. Then, through the discipline of the mind and the control of the senses you can behold the Absolute who resides in your heart. Make no difference between the God Absolute and the Master to whom you have surrendered. Even matters that have not been explicitly declared in the scriptures will become manifest to such a seeker.

So it all comes down to Devotion to the Absolute, or devotion to the *guru* who is nothing but the Absolute. In such a devotion, there is to be no distinction between God and God. The usual talk among the masses about the worship of *Shiva* or *Vishnu* (the two major Gods of the Hindu trinity) being two contrary disciplines does not make sense to Shankara. There is not only no difference; they are one and the same. The Absolute in two garbs, that is all. Shankara is so convinced about the importance of this non-difference that he prays to God in one of his *stotras*, as if he were afraid that he himself might get lost and lose his conviction in this maze of confusion prevalent in this world!: Oh Goddess Ganga! When it is time to lay off my body on the banks of your sacred

waters, happily meditating on the lotus-feet of *Narayana*, may the unqualified devotion to the everlasting one-ness of *hari* and *hara*, the non-dual Supreme, become the blessed festivity in me of bidding good-bye to this life.! Here and elsewhere*, hari* and *hara* are alternate names for *Vishnu* and *Shiva* respectively. The first step in understanding the non-dual philsophy of Shankara is this non-difference of *Shiva* and *Vishnu*. The next step is to realise that this one God is not only transcendent but also immanent in every one of the living beings. This makes Shankara define devotion as nothing but the contemplation of one's real self.:

svasvarUpA-nusandhAnaM bhaktir-ity-abhidhIyate

As oil dwells in the oil-seed, as curd in milk, as water in a ground-water source or as fire in firewood so does He dwell in the Universe:

tileSu tailaM dadhinIva sarpiH Apah Srotas-varaNIshu cAgniH …

– says *ShvetASvatara-upanishad*. This Absolute is everywhere, in front of us, behind us, above us, below us, to the right of us, to the left of us – the scriptures do not tire of repeating this kind of refrain. And all this is in oneself, i.e., one's Self. This Self is everywhere. That is why the I.U. says: It is already there before even the fastest mind goes there. In the entire philosophical thought process of the world this thought that the whole universe is immanent in oneself is a giant leap for mankind. When the universe dissolves in the Ultimate, it is a stepwise dissolution. From earth to water, from water to fire, from fire to air, from air to space – these are the stages of dissolution. Finally what remains is Space. Even that space finally will dissolve in the *Atman*, says the scripture. Can we imagine this situation when there is nothing, not even space? It is to help us attempt the mental gymnastics of comprehending this that all the scriptures cry hoarse on this topic.

Great devotees and exponents of the Advaitic school (of Shankara) have extolled the qualities and pleasures of *bhakti* so eloquently that for the ordinary man there should be no doubt about the fundamental role of *bhakti* in *advaita*. But critics of *advaita* as well as laymen who have not cared to take the effort to understand what *advaita* is, do sometimes declare that *bhakti* is not concordant with the concept of *advaita* and to be a devotee is not the forte of an Advaitin. Their question is: how can *bhakti* coexist with *advaita*? According to them, the teaching (of *advaita*) that the Self of each individual is the same as the Supreme Self is contradictory to the duality implied in the concept of *bhakti*. In the process of devotion there is always a duality involved - namely, the worshipper and the worshipped. If God or the Supreme Reality does not have a separate status other than our Selves, then who is to worship whom? *advaita* means non-duality. There is no second object in existence other than the Supreme Godhead. So where is the leeway for any worship or devotion? Says Shankara in his S.L. (Verse No.81): Sometime in worshipping the lotus-feet of God, sometime in meditation and concentration, sometime in offering obeisance, sometime in listening to His stories, sometime in looking at His form, sometime in singing His praise, he who gains such a state in exhultation, having surrendered his mind to God, is verily a *Jivan-mukta* , the highest state of Spiritual Love. It is the same Shankara who declares through all his commentaries and *prakarana*-

granthas that Knowledge alone -- neither an integration of Knowledge and Works nor an integration of Knowledge and Devotion -- that leads to *moksha.* But to get to that state of Knowledge where one perceives nothing else, because there is only the Perceiver, he strongly recommends the doing of Works in a desireless unattached way and with a one-pointed devotion to the Ultimate. In order to impress upon us laymen that this is the only way to ascend to spiritual heights, he tours the whole country more than once, visits almost every important temple and place of pilgrimage and sings his compositions in praise of the revered deities of that place in the most eloquent poetry. He it is who has established the tradition of ritually worshipping together all the five divinities – *sUrya*, the Sun-God; *Shakti*, the Mother; *Vishnu*, *gaNeSa* and *Shiva* -- of the Hindu tradition through a sophisticated ritual called the *panchAyatana pUja*, meaning worship at five altars. Here the divinities are worshipped not in their human-like forms but in certain symbols in the form of stones, which are nothing but certain rock formations available in specified locations in the country**. This tradition may be taken as an intermediate stage between the worship of Godhead with form and the worship of the formless, because the symbols of worship as rock formations have certainly a form but they are also formless in that they have no parts like face, eyes, body, hands or feet**. It is as though the devotee trains himself to take the mind from the forms to the formless while at the same time allowing full scope for his emotional feelings of devotion and surrender. It is because of this that invocation *mantra*s in the advaitic tradition contain effectively the following idea as the core of the *mantra*. Oh God! I know you are omnipresent. But, for the purpose of my concentration and worship please condescend to make your presence felt here in this idol (image, picture or stone or whatever) for the period of the *pUjA*; maybe I am insulting your omnipresence by requesting you to confine yourself to this form and space, but please pardon me; I know no other way'.

The ascent from our physical, vital, emotional and intellectual being into the supermind of spiritual being is spiritual evolution. The technology of this ascent is Spiritual Love**.** There are at least three stages through which one has to rise. The first is *bAhya bhakti* or external *bhakti*. This is adoration of something outside ourselves. It is based on the unenlightened *tAmasik* feeling that God is external to us and that He dwells in a particular locality – a temple, a shrine or a holy place or bathing ghAT. Popular religion does not usually rise above this level. The second stage of *bhakti* is *ananya bhakti*, the exclusive and passionate (*rAjasik*) worship of one's favourite deity . It is in fact an intense monotheism. The entire Ram-charit-manas of Tulsidas is a monumental example of the purity and majesty of *ananya-bhakti*.The third stage of *bhakti* is *ekAnta bhakti*, the purest (*sAtvik*) form. Here the worshipper loves God for His own sake and not for His gifts, not even for *moksha*. It is free from the feeling for any other object. It is the service of the Lord – an adoring service that implies centering of the mind on Him , expecting no gain either here or hereafter. It is a constant flow of mind, brimming with love towards the Lord and His creation, without any selfish desire. All his activities are sublimated into worship of the Divine. Whatever he does, whatever he eats, whatever he offers, is all a dedication to the Divine, not just as a formality, as ordinary virtuous people profess to be doing, but in total reality. Such a devotee appears to be doing external activities but since his ego is in total sublimation to the Divine he is not doing anything for himself. Even the distinction between sacred and secular activity disappears in such a soul. Every work is

sacred to him inasmuch as it is an expression of his love of God. This supreme love of God was expressed by the cowherdesses of Brindavan. Their love can be understood by us only if, in the words of Swami VivekAnanda 'we can forget our love of gold, name and fame and this little material world of ours'. Their love, even though it originated in a kind of physical desire, rose up to the highest plane of self-effacing love of God, because of the holy association of the Divine, and thus in its final stages became the pinnacle of perfection of *bhakti*.

The artistic manifestation of this *bhakti* can take place in one or more of nine ways – says Prahlad, the Devotee par excellence. This statement of his occurs as a spirited reply of a boy of five years old to the arrogant father's seemingly innocent query about the former's progress in his study-in-residence with the *guru*. **It is one of the grandest pronouncements of the Hindu religion, that has since been quoted across the world billions of times**. For this, see the Section on *Prahlada charitam* in the chapter on 'Gems from Shrimad BhagavataM'.

It is not the name of the deity, *Vishnu* or Narayana, that is important here. The name is not there to distinguish it from the other names of God. This is the purport of *advaita*. Whether it is *Shiva* or *Vishnu*, all the references are only to the One Supreme God – this is the intent of the Vedas. 'He is Brahma, He is *Shiva*, He is Hari, He is Indra, He is the Imperishable, He is the Transcendental Supreme' says the M.N.U. part of Yajur Veda. This teaching of non-difference is most important for the understanding of Hinduism - says Shankara. It is not even correct to say Sanatana Dharma - says Shankara. It is not even correct to say that *Shiva* and *Vishnu* are 'equal' says the Mahaswami of Kanchi. 'They are the same; just as the same actor appears in different roles, one is the Paramatma (=Transcendental Supreme) dressed as *Vishnu* and the other is Paramatma dressed as *Shiva*. Throughout the vedic literature one will find various divinities Varuna, Indra, Soma, Agni and Surya each glorified at one point to the exclusion of everything else. Any attempt to dissect the meanings and find a logical hierarchical explanation in the worldly literary sense of characters in literary fiction, would fail miserably. The entire mythological set-up embedded in the multitude of our *purANa*s, if taken at their story-value without any feeling for the under-current of the oneness of the Almighty, will create nothing but chaos in our intellectual understanding. The different hymns eulogising the different gods and goddesses are couched either in simple language with complex meanings or in complex language which perhaps hide simple ideas. It is very easy to misunderstand their significance and meanings. Western interpreters who have not got into the spirit of the religion have erred in a colossal manner. If you carefully look at the superlatives being used in the Vedic literature in the same manner and language for each Vedic deity and if you look at the exact imitations of these eulogies made by the *purANa*s for the various other manifestations of the Ultimate Divinity, one cannot but conclude that the last words of the Vedas are those passages where each such deity is considered as only one expression of the same many-faceted supreme Almighty. One such passage from the Aitareya Upanishad raises the question: Who is this Self, whom we desire to worship? Is he the self by which we see, hear, etc.? Is he the heart and mind by which we perceive? No, says the Upanishad. These are but adjuncts of the Self. The Self itself is Pure Consciousness. He is *Brahman*. He is God, He is Brahma, He is Indra,

He is all Gods; the five elements – earth air space, water fire; all beings, great or small, born of eggs, born from the womb, born from heat, born from soil; horses, cows, men, elephants, birds; everything that breathes, the beings that walk and the beings that walk not, the beings that fly and those that fly not. The reality behind all these is *Brahman*, who is pure Consciousness. Consciousness is *Brahman*.

The natural state of each individual is the state of being *Brahman*, say the scriptures. Shankara therefore defines *bhakti* in specific terms as contemplative living in one's natural state, that is, the divine state. This *brahma-bhAva*, being in *Brahman*, automatically implies an equanimous view of every being in the world as the same self as the one dwells in the seer. This balanced view of everything as One, everything as the Self, is a blissful experience, called *brahma-Ananda*. It does not come out of studies or scholarship. It is a state to be enjoyed internally, not by the external apparatus. When that experience crystallises, there is no more knowledge, no more ignorance, no perceiver, nothing perceived, no perception. All that is seen by these enlightened souls is the godliness of Infinite Love and the loveliness of the Omnipresent God.

Shankara waxes eloquent about such a state of supreme *bhakti*, which we call *advaita bhakti*, in glowing terms. This poetic but precise description of Shankara is very often quoted as the thesis on *bhakti*. It is verse no.61 of *ShivAnanda-lahari*. It gives five analogies for *bhakti* or Devotion to Divinity. The first one cites what is called an ankola tree which has the characteristic that when its seeds fall from the tree on the ground and mature, they travel to the base of the tree and join the roots by their own nature. Just as these seeds reach the tree with a one-pointed purpose, so also the devotee should be devoted to his God of devotion – is the theme. The second analogy is that of iron filings that are drawn to a magnet. In these two analogies the duality of the components of the system involved is all but obvious. The next two analogies are that of a chaste wife being devoted and drawn towards her husband and that of a creeper which winds around a parent tree. In these two cases the quality of the relationship is certainly different from that of the first two analogies but still some duality remains. The fifth analogy is that of a river which is irrevocably bound to a path towards the ocean, its ultimate destination. It appears it is this analogy that is closest to the heart of Adi Shankara as far as his definition of *bhakti* is concerned.

Think of a golden ring. Does gold have the form of a ring? Goldness has nothing to do with the shape of a ring or roundness. The roundness of the ring is extraneous to gold. Do not see the ring, see only the gold, they say. This is why even words fail when the Vedas want to describe the Ultimate. What is not spoken by the tongue but what makes the tongue speak is *Brahman*, not the thing that is before you, says Kenopanishad. It is something which the words cannot describe, eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear. Even the senses cannot sense it. How can the Seer see himself? How can the Knower know himself? So somehow out of all the multiplicity that is visible to us we have to see and sense the unity which is our own Self.

5. The Non-absolutist School

The seeds of the concept of *bhakti* go back to even the vedas. The plant of *bhakti* sprouts in the Upanishads; becomes a full-fledged plant in the *itihAsa*s, particularly the mahA-bhArata, blossoms in the *PurANA*s, and flowers in the Agamas both of the Saivite and vaishNavite varieties . The AlvArs and nAyanmArs bring out the fruits which ripen in the age of the AcAryas for all posterity to consume, enjoy and attain beatitude. The personal God with all His superlative attributes is worshipped mainly in six forms – *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Shakti*, sUrya, gaNapati and subrahmaNya.

Among the various non-Absolutist conceptions of God Sri Ramanuja's is the most well known, has the largest following and has the claim to the longest tradition. It conceives of a Personal God with infinite divine attributes and infinite varieties of auspicious forms. He, however, is the single Conscious Entity that has all matter and all the souls as His body. He has infinite compassion for the souls and so He is greatly concerned about their salvation. The soul has to comprehend this Inner Reality, rid itself of the three-fold miseries of life and merge in the infinite bliss of the eternal sanctity of God. This is *moksha*. This is a communion with God, not a realization of complete identity. Those who desire this, should practise a seven-fold discipline – namely, the discretion of consuming only the right type of pure food; dispassion; the attitude of living in the presence of the Absolute; the action of the five daily rituals (*yajnas*), the ethics of a *dhArmic* life, absence of frustration and, finally, the absence of delusion caused by affluence and material happiness. Such a one does his duties as the dictates of the Lord and in total dedication to Him. This leads first to internal purity and in due time blesses one with the insight of Yoga wherein one can visualise the Spirit. That leads to the awareness of the Soul of all Souls. Love of God pours forth spontaneously now. It is a self-forgetting Love that continues uninterruptedly like the pouring out of oil. This is *the bhakti*. The Lord may be conceived of as your guide, your master, your friend, your child, your beloved. Each one of these perfects the devotional attitude and ends up by creating the irresistible urge to see Him in person. That is the stage of *bhakti par excellence*. And when that vision of the Supreme Person sparks then is the stage of Supreme Enlightenment. Thereafter there is no return to the mundane living. The Lord then frees you from the bodily prison and takes you to His abode to live in fellowship with Him.. The thing that makes this happen is only the Grace of the Lord and nothing else. That is why the Lord is said to be both the ultimate goal (*upeyaM*) as well as the path (*upAya*) to that goal . Such a faith ends up in the action of surrender to the Lord. Desika lists eight kinds of devotion which epitomise the concept of spiritual love in a masterly fashion:

Feeling at home in the company of devotees; Enjoying the worship of the Lord; An unsatiated eagerness to listen to the stories of God; Horripilation and choking of voice when hearing about Him, talking to Him and remembering Him; Performing of ritual *pujA* to the deities; =Not showing off in one's service to God; Meditation of Him and Him only; and Praying to Him, never for mundane trivialities.

Nimbarka of the twelfth century propagated what is called *dvaitAdaita* school of thinking; dvaita is duality and *advaita* is non-duality. According to Nimbarka the souls

and the universe are different from the Absolute which rules them. Yet just as the spider's web though different from the spider which has woven it is still one with the spider because it is nothing but the saliva of the spider it is the Lord that has become the souls and the universe. Thus difference and non-difference are emphasized equally. Difference is when existence is separate though not independent. Non-difference is the impossibility of separate existence. Like the ocean and the waves, like the Sun and its Light, there is difference and at the same time non-difference. One should take the Absolute *Brahman* as the Soul of all souls and of the Universe, comprehend this difference-in-non-difference and surrender oneself to the Lord in toto. The attitude of Radha to Krishna is what is recommended by this school. *SrImad BhA.* is the most respected scripture.

To the great Madhwa-AcArya (13th century) is to be attributed the credit for the massive propagation of the school of duality (*dvaita*). Lord *Vishnu* with all his attributes and forms is the Absolute Truth and God Almighty. He has a tremendous compassion towards his creation. He gives men what they deserve according to their past *karma* and their present tendencies. He is the protector of every soul. The three concepts *cit, acit* and *ISvara* are all three different. Lord *Vishnu* creates by his Will. Those who desire mokSa should start from the hypothesis of God being the master and man his servant and live his life by serving Him and dwelling on the glories of God. This would generate the right *bhakti* in him. By doing God's will, one nurtures this *bhakti*. Finally by His Grace one attains salvation and experiences the state of Bliss in proportion to the *sAtvic* deeds he has done. The goal of life is to serve God both in this life and in the after-life. The role model of this *bhakti* is Hanuman of the Ramayana. The entire philosophy of *bhakti* of this school is enjoyably summarised in a mini-encyclopaedic work - *hari-kathA-mRta-sAram* - of Jagannatha-dasa of the eighteenth century. That the Lord is such a compassionate One who takes ten steps towards you the moment you take one step towards Him is an accepted maxim of all schools of philosophy. But the dramatic and figurative way in which Jagannatha-dasa expresses this is inimitable. Says he: 'The Lord is always one step ahead. If the devotee prays from a reclining position, God sits and listens. If the devotee appeals sitting, God stands attentively. If the former stands, God walks around him and registers his requests. If he walks and prays, God displays his love by ecstatic dancing and jumping'! The conclusion of course is implied: If the devotee dances and jumps in his chanting, what will not Hee He do for him?

VallabhAcArya of the 15th and 16th centuries spread the theory of *SuddhAdvaita* . According to this the glorious Krishna in His *sat-chid-Ananda* form is the Absolute *Brahman*. He is permanently playing out His sport (*leela)* from His seat in the *goloka* which is even beyond the divine *vaikunTHa*, the abode of *Vishnu*. Creation is His sport. To obtain the Bliss given out by Krishna the only path is *bhakti*. But in this age of *kali*, the scripture-sanctioned *bhakti* is impossible to practise. So what is recommended is *puSTi bhakti* –which we can all get from the natural Grace of God just like that, for no reason whatsoever. It is that *bhakti* which gives itself up body, heart and soul to the cause of God. It is considered to be the fullest expression of what is known as *Atma-nivedana* (= giving-up of oneself*)* among the nine forms of *bhakti*. It is the *bhakti* of the devotee who worships God not for any reward or presents but for His own sake. Such a devotee goes to *goloka* after leaving this body and lives in eternal bliss enjoying the sports of the

Lord. The classical example of this complete self-effacement is that of the cow-herdesses towards Krishna. They spoke no word except prayer and they moved no step except towards Krishna. Their supreme-most meditation was on the lotus-feet of Krishna.

Sri Krishna Chaitanya of the 16th century is universally known for his propagation, by excellent example of his own life, of the *acintya-bheda-abheda* philosophy and the conviction about the Radha-Krishna theme that popularised Radha as a Goddess and an Avatara of Lakshmi. The relationship between the Lord and His consort is that of difference within non-difference and is therefore mentally unimaginable. The Lord is having an eternal sport with Radha. By his charming sports and beautiful form He mesmerises Man, corrects him and blesses him. *bhakti* is the only means to reach Him. By constant practice of the instruments of *bhakti*, and by cultivating a taste for the names of the Lord, compassion for the living, service to the servants of God, one increases one's component of *satva-guNa* (=divine tendency) and his devotion now becomes a passion for the divine in due course. This leads step by step to a state of supreme ecstasy. To reach this one may start from the silent *bhakti* of Bhishma, move on to the *vAtsalya* (filial affection) *bhakti* of Yasoda, the friendly *bhakti* of Arjuna, the *dAsya bhakti* (devotion by a servant) of Hanuman and finally reaches the *mAdhura bhakti* (devotion of Love) of the *gopis*– where the relationship between the devotee and the Lord is that of the spouse to the beloved. This form of *bhakti* is most graphically portrayed in *gIta-Govinda* of Jayadeva of the 12th century. For more about Chaitanya, see the Section on Twelve Gems of Superlative Devotion.

Starting from Jnaneswar of the 13th century, the Maharashtrian tradition brought forth a philosophy which in some sense unified the two paths of *jnAna* and *bhakti*. According to this school, the ultimate *Brahman* is both attributeless and attributed -- that is, both impersonal and personal. To reach the Personal Ultimate one needs the *bhakti* of Love. To reach the Formless Ultimate one needs Enlightenment. For the former there is any one of nine methods which are classical.

To reach the Impersonal Ultimate one needs to discipline oneself through the three-fold ascent of *SravaNa* (listening), *manana* (deliberation on what has been learnt) and *nididhyAsana* (the analysis and synthesis of the accrued knowledge). This school has a stronghold in the Maharashtra area because of a succession of great devotees and expositors like Namdev (13th and 14th centuries) Eknath (16th century), Tukaram (17th century) and Samarth Ramdas (also of the 17th century)

6. Seventy-five Apostles of God-intoxication

These are the twelve Vaishnava Alvars and sixty-three Shaiva Nayanmars. For all these, religion was a poignant human experience of togetherness with either Lord *Vishnu* (in the first case) or Lord Shiva (in the second case). They revered the Vedic texts, knew the principal Puranas, avocated the recitation of God's varied names, strongly recommended meditation on His different forms and the Mantras associated with Him and literally lived by worshipping Him in the temples all over the land of the Tamils. Some of them were superlatively gifted singers as well. They have left behind an imperishable legacy of

devotional poetry rarely paralleled in quantity or quality before or after. The songs are so surcharged with emotion and feeling as to permeate the very hearts of the listeners and ennoble them to become one with the saints in their devotion to God.

These songs give expression to the purest love of God and are most reverently recited in all Hindu temples that have a Tamil origin and by all Tamil Hindu families who believe in worship as an important daily routine. In addition the literary value of all this poetry is great as is shown by the fact that this massive collection of 20000 verses (4000 Vaishnava hymns and 16000 Saiva hymns) outweighs all other literature produced during this period so much that historians of Tamil literature have taken the liberty of designating this period (6^{th} to 10^{th} century C.E.) the age of Devotional Literature. The Bhakti literature that emanated this way has in no small measure contributed to the establishment and sustenance of a culture that broke away from the ritual-oriented Vedic religion and rooted itself in Devotion as the only path for Salvation. While north India produced Saints who wrote exquisite poetry and sang devotional music like Mirabai, Kabir and Surdas, they were not immortalised in art or worshipped in temples. Saints of the western world are frequently portrayed in art, but their presence in churches and cathedrals does not seem to be universal. By contrast icons of these 12 Vaishnava and 63 Shaiva south Indian saints were invariably commissioned by the *Vishnu* and Shiva temples respectively. They were placed in prominent positions and were accorded ritual worship. To this day these saints remain a living tradition. Their images are carried in processions during festivals along with the main deities of the temples. Sometimes there are festivals exclusively for them. Their hymns are chanted in homes and at a variety of ceremonial gatherings including secular performances of dance and music.

Peria-purANam

The Peria-puranam, also known as TiruttoNDar-puranam is a poetical account in 4253 verses, by Sekkizhar (12^{th} cen. C.E.), of the lives of 63 Shaivaite saints, who lived in Tamilnadu upto the eighth century C.E. Some of these belong to the B.C.E. era. Sekkizhar inherited a tradition which credited Sundaramurthi Nayanar (shortly, Sundarar), one of the four grandmasters of the Shaiva devotional tradition, of the 8^{th} century, as the first one who sang eleven songs in praise of these devotees of Shiva. It was Sundarar who must have realised the importance of each one of them. His work was known as Tiruttondattogai. Nambiandar-nambi of the 10^{th} century elaborated this into 89 quatrains as Tirut-tondar-tiruvandadi.

It was Nambi who discovered the whereabouts of the TevAram hymns, (see the story in the Section on ‘The Divine Dance’ in Chapter 2) and at the instance of King Rajaraja I he made them into seven Tirumurais. Sambandar’s hymns were made into the first three, those of Appar the second three and sundarar’s the seventh.

Sekkizhar was the Prime Minister of Kulottunga chola (1070 – 1108), also known as Anapaya chola. Sekkizhar set the entire hagiology within the framework of Sundarar’s life. After Sekkizhar his masterly work was included as the twelfth Tirumurai in the redaction of Shaiva canonical scripture. In fact one motivation for Sekkizhar was to wean

his King away from his Jain inclinations which were evident from his spending much time reading and enjoying Jivaka Chintamani, an innovative and provocatively exemplary work of the 9^{th} century by Tiruttakka-ttevar.

The 63 Nayanmars

The Saints of Periapuranam belong to various communities, high and low, as devotion to the Almighty knows no barriers. Most of them were householders. Some of them belonged to the so-called low castes. Some were just illiterate. We have a hunter, a fisherman, an oilman, a washerman, a pulayan (who cleaned the flesh of dead animals). The popularity of the work and the reverence given to it are due to several reasons: its intensity of devotion, its simple style, the extraordinary humility of each of the devotees dealt therein and their fathomless love for God. These stories include

- that of Enadinathar, who was prepared to lay his life down in the presence of the marks of *Shiva* which his enemy wore;
- that of Muurkkar, who resorts to the extreme of gambling in order to serve the devotees of *Shiva*;
- that of the royal PugazhCholar who enters fire in order to expiate for the 'sin' of having been the cause of the death of a *Shiva*-devotee, a soldier in the enemy's army killed by his soldiers in a legitimate war;
- that of the chieftain of Kalandai, who, even after getting all the qualifications for royalty did not wear a crown, but instead ruled as King with the mould of *Shiva*'s divine feet on his head;
- that of the 'untouchable' Nandanar (see his story in Chapter 2 under the Section 'The Dance Divine') for whom the stone Nandi itself moved away for his darshan of the Lord;
- that of the rural, illiterate and unsophisticated hunter Thinnan, who decided to sacrifice his only remaining eye for shutting off the blooding from the eye of the *Shiva*-linga, and for that purpose placed his foot on the eye of the Lord in order to be able to identify it after his eye was plucked – and thus came to be known as Kannappar (See below for the full story and a philosophical interpretation);
- that of the Brahmin devotee of Tiruttalaiyur, Rudra-pashupati, who had so much faith in the recitation of Rudram from Yajur veda that all his life he used to stand in neck-deep water three times a day and recite Rudram and in due time reached the abode of Lord Shiva;
- that of Appodi-adigal, whose little son died, by snake-bite, exactly at the time when the parents were hosting their role-model Appar (see the story of Appar below) as a guest and Appar took the dead body to the *Shiva* temple where he implored God to bring back the boy to life and the Lord obliged;
- that of the born-blind Dandiyadigal, who faced the challenge from Jain opponents who prevented him from digging a well for the *Shiva* temple, and for whom the Lord came to the rescue by giving him eyesight while taking off the same from the opponents;
- that of the saintly Punitavati of Karaikkal, who, on her husband recognising her divinity and thereby deciding to only do worship to her as a deity, instantly

prayed to Lord Shiva to take away all her flesh and leave her only with a bone skeleton for the rest of her life to be in the Lord's service without being distracted by any attention on her;

- and many more, of whom the four Grandmasters of the Shaiva Cannon, Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar and Manickavachagar are certainly there, right at the top of the entire list.

Appar

The foremost among the 63 devotees of Shiva was *Tirunavukkarasu-nayanar,* also known more popularly as Appar, whose miracles have been chronicled everywhere in Saiva literature and history. His soul-stirring songs are clear and emphatic and show him as an exemplary devotee of the Lord. He considered himself as a lowly servant of God in all his activities and compositions.

MarulnIkkiyar was his original name. He was born in a rich Vellala agriculturist family probably in 610 C.E. By nature he was oriented towards public service for social benefits. Moved by compassion, he enjoyed digging tanks, constructing roads, and providing drinking water to passers-by. He was attracted to Jainism, mastered its doctrines and became head of a monastery at Tiruppadirippuliyur. His elder sister, Tilakavathi, who took care of him after the death of their parents, prayed, as a devout Shaivaite, to Lord Shiva of Tiruvadigai for his reconverting to Shaivism. By God's Grace Appar was disenchanted with Jainism when he was cured of a chronic abdominal pain and returned to Shaivism. The king sentenced him to death for treason and and repeated attempts were made to carry out the sentence. The Jains first threw him into a burning lime kiln, hoping that the heat of the flames will kill him. Fixing his mind on Lord Shiva and immersed in yoga, Tirunavukkarasar emerged unhurt because the heat of the kiln was transformed into a cool breeze. Next, when they tried to poison him to death, the grace of Lord Shiva turned the poison into sweet nectar. Finally, Tirunavukkarasar was tied to a stone and dropped into the sea but the power of his prayers was such that the stone floated and bore him to the shores of a neighboring town. Brought before the Pallava king Mahendravarman I, he was able to convert the King himself to Shaivism.

Appar is credited with many miracles that happened during his travels around the Tamil country. He, along with Tirugnanansambandhar, are said to have prayed for the alleviation of a a raging famine that had ruined Tiruvilimalai. Appar is also said to have reopened a temple in Vedaranyam that had shut itself due to the growth of aDharma in the world. He is also accredited with reconverting a Shiva temple that Jains had taken over.

On one of his journeys, Appar came to Tingalur, where a devout Brahmin named Appudi Adigal had built feeding houses, wells, water tanks and sheds, and named them all after Tirunavukkarasar. He was greatly elated by Appar's visit and invited the great sage to dine at his house. While they were conversing at his house, Appudi Adigal's son went to cut banana leafs to serve the food on. A poisonous snake that was on the banana tree bit him, killing the boy instantly. Fearing that Appar would not eat at their home if he knew

about the boy's death, Appudi Adigal and his wife hid the body. Appar, who learned of the incident through divine intuition, was overcome with grief for the family, took the dead body to the temple and prayed for the grace of Lord Shiva. Shiva answered his prayers and the lifeless body of the child came back to life.

Appar's fame and faith spread throughout South India through the simple hymns of self-surrender that he sang on his long sojourn from one sacred shrine to another. Of his songs 311 have been collected in the TevAram collection. Appar's message of service to God and fellow humans has timeless appeal and his impact on the religious and social life of the Tamil people is remarkable. Pictures show him holding in his hand a little tool for scraping grass, with which he used to scrape the stones of the temple courts. He attained to the Lord's abode at the age of 81.

Tiru-jnAna-sambandar

Appar's junior contemporary, Sambandar, was a wandering minstrel who sang poems after poems in his very short life of 16 years and triumphantly re-established the Saiva branch of Hinduism in opposition to religions like Buddhism and Jainism. This Saint who lived the briefest life gets the largest space in Sekkizhar's TiruttonDar Puranam.

Sambandar is said to have cried for mother's milk at the age of three and was breast-fed by Mother Goddess Herself with divine milk. Having tasted the milk of true knowledge, as it were, he became known as Tiru-jnAna-sambandar. The well-known padigam 'ToDuDaiya Seviyan' was sung by him immediately. Throughout his life Sambandar treated himself as the son of God.

It was in one of Tirunavukkarasar's pilgrimages to Chidambaram that word reached him about the child saint Tirugnanasambandhar being in nearby Sirkazhi, and the elder saint proceeded at once to meet him. What ensued was one of the most remarkable meetings of the two greatest Tamil Saiva saints, said to have occurred around the year 650. Upon reaching Sirkazhi, where Tirugnanasambandhar was waiting to greet him, Tirunavukkarasar prostrated at the feet of the much younger saint. This prompted Tirugnanasambandhar to lift him up and call him 'Appar,' father, as a sign of respect. The name Appar remained a popular title for Tirunavukkarasar throughout his life. Tirugnanasambandhar then also fell at Appar's feet, and this exchange became a model of conduct for future devotees.

The two wise Saiva saints travelled together for a time, visiting Shiva temples along the Kaveri River in Tamil Nadu and composing many hymns. The songs they composed, along with that of Sundaramurthy Swamigal, formed the great Tamil compendium of poetry known as Tevaram. The influence of Tirunavukkarasar and Tirugnanasambandhar in reaffirming Saiva Siddhanta in India in the face of the rise of Jainism and Buddhism was undeniable. Their poetry and example were instrumental in promoting the *bhakti* movement that is an integral part of Saiva Siddhanta. It was indeed to face this threat to Hinduism that saw the rise of a great number of Saiva saints during that period of time,

and among them, Tirunavukkarasar and Tirugnanasambandhar were unsurpassed. The Lord performed miracle after miracle for these two favoured devotees of his.

In Sambandar's hymns he described the natural beauty of the land in which the shrines were situated, mentioned the puranic and epic incidents associated with the shrines, expounded the Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy in its *bhakti* aspect, praised himself always in the eleventh and supplementary verses of the decad and called upon the pious to reverently chant his hymns. He set them to music and sang them himself. His *ToDuDaiya Seviyan* announces his immediacy to God. His *TirunIRRuppadigam* mentions the supreme efficacy of the sacred ashes. His *Vazhga andaNar* proclaims his mastery over the elements. Madar maDappiDi reveals the greatness of his music. His *Veyuru Toli bangan* demonstrates his faith in God as aginst the very worst that the planets can do un to him.

He was also known as Aludaip-pillai. He allowed himself to be married at the age of 16. Assembling all his devotee associates in the marriage house he decided to merge into divinity by entering fire. He sang the 'Emaip-pokkaruLir' padigam and Lord *Shiva* gathered him and his fellow devotees unto Himself.

Sundarar

Sundaramurthy Swamigal, was in such great friendly intimacy with the Lord without ever being oblivious of His Divinity, that he made use of His services even for settling domestic quarrels; he was the first to sing the praise of the sixty-three Nayanmars. It was he who for the first time enunciated the importance of each one of the other 62 Nayanmars and listed them in TiruttonDattogai. On this work was based Nambi Andar Nambi's Tiruttondar Tiru Andadi. The story of Periapuranam written by Sekkizhar, starts and ends with the story of Sundarar.

Sundarar was born as a Brahmin, Nambi Aroorar by name, in Tirunavlur in the 9th century.. Both his parents are among the 62 Nayanmars in his list. Unlike Appar and Sambandar he behaved towards God as a friend. He treated the Lord as a coinfidant and took strange liberties with him. It is interesting that Lord Shiva who prevented his marriage by claiming him as His slave, served to bring about an alliance with a professional courtesan in Tiruvarur. It appears Sundarar was born in the human world by a curse of Lord Shiva. As such everything in his life happened according to God's wishes and monitoring. And in Sundarar's life, many miracles happened – some of them at Sundarar's request to the Lord through a song. Sundarar's contribution to the Shaiva canon is 1036.

Manickavachagar

Manickavachagar, also known as Tiruvadavoorar, was a contemporary of Varaguna Pandian II of the 9th century. His unique bridal mysticism, undivided loyalty and exclusive devotion to the Lord, find immortal expression in his exquisite poems like TiruvAchagam, which is a work of devotion-cum-wisdom par excellence known to melt

even the hardest of hearts. Born in Tiru-Adavur near Madurai, his erudition, scholarship, good character and smartness attracted the attention of the Pandyan King who appointed him as one of his Ministers. Manickavachagar was a great devotee of Shiva and this slowly drew him away from his worldly involvements.

The King learnt that good Arabic horses were being sold near the eastern sea coast in the Chola country. So Manickavachagar was sent to negotiate a deal and purchase the horses for the cavalry of the Pandya Kingdom. On the way he was spiritually overwhelmed by a Shaivite Saint in the town of Tirupperunturai. He then realised material things are all transitory.His own conviction is that Lord Shiva himself came in the guise of that Saint and took him in. Manickavachagar was thereafter doing nothing but work for the temple in the service of the Lord. Actually he renovated the temple of Tirupperunturai with the money kept for the purchase of horses. The King heard of this turn of events and he sent his men to arrest him. But his spiritual Guru the Shaiva saint advised him to tell the king that the horses will arrive on the Moola-nakshatra day in the month of Avani (corresponding to August-September, when the Sun stays in the zodiacal sign of Leo). On the scheduled day the horses did arrive; but lo and behold! that night the horses changed into howling jackals and ran away. The King naturally became very furious and he put Manickavachagar in jail. But any such torment was taken by Manickavachagar as nothing but a service to Lord Shiva and so the only prayer he made to the Lord was to bestow on him more and more devotion to the Supreme.

In the meantime another miracle happened to convert the King. Due to the onset of floods in the river Vaigai, the King ordered every house to contribute one person for doing the manual work of raising the embankment to resist the floods. A poor woman by name 'Vanthi' whose living was by making and selling 'Pittu' for the public could not contribute one such person and so as a devotee of Lord Shiva she prayed to the Lord to help. The Lord came in the form of a labourer and offered to help and accordingly did the manual job of digging mud to be thrown into the flooding waters. But he also showed slackness in doing the job; naturally the supervisor complained about him to the King. The King awarded him a punishment of beating. But lo, when the beating by stick was actually executed, the beating was felt by everybody around including the King. The King realised his folly and it was realised by all that the labourer who enrolled himself on behalf of the poor woman, was none but God Himself, because no sooner the beating was felt by everybody, he disappeared and the flood waters subsided. The King retracted from his rash act of imprisoning Manickavachagar and released him. Thereafter Manickavachagar spent his life as a Sannyasi and gave himself completely to Lord Shiva. He went from place to place and finally stayed in Chidambaram, where he defeated, in argument, a contingent of Buddhists from Ceylon.

The Tiruvachagam of 600 verses and the Tirukkovaiyar of 400 verses constitute his contribution to Shaivite devotional literature. Both have been included as the eighth Tirummurai of Nambi's edition of Saivite sacred texts. The pious belief is that Lord Shiva himself wrote these texts to the dictation of the great saint. One of the devotional poems in Tiruvachagam, namely Tiruvempavai follows the Tiruppavai of Sri Andal in pattern. The intensity of devotional feeling that the very phrasing in the poems generates

in sensitive minds is such that it is true to say that 'he who is not moved by the Tiruvachagam will be moved by nothing whatsoever.' Tiruvachagam is as famous among the bhakti works in Tamil as the Gita itself is in Sanskrit. The work is full of inspired outpourings of the Bliss of God-experience.

The Tirukkovaiyar belongs to the Kovai type of literature and deals with the loving hero and beloved heroine and their love affairs. But the difference between this Kovai and other Kovais is the divine theme, whereby, the hero in this poem is Lord Shiva himself and the poet imagines himself to be the lady love. The anguish of being separated from God is the undercurrent of 'rasa' in both the works of Manikkavachagar.

Manickavachagar died at the age of 32, it is said, by entering the divine flame in the sanctum of the shrine of Nataraja in Chidambaram.

Here are two samples from Tiruvachagam:

Tevar kO aRiyAda tEva-tEvan chezhum pozhilkaL payandu kAttu azhikkum maRRai
mUvar kOnai ninRa mudalvan mUrti mUdAdai mAdu Alum pAkattu enthai
yAvar kOn ennaiyum vandu ANDukoNDAn yAm Arkkum kuDi allOm yAdum anjOm
mEvinomavan aDiyAr aDiyArODu mEl mElum kuDaindu Adi AdiDuvOmE.

Even the King of the divines does not know the Lord of Lords, who is the Head of the Trinity. He is the Cause of all that has been created. He is the One who has kept the Goddess in one half of his body and has also taken me in.We shall not bow down to any other. There is nothing more to fear. Let us, all devotees of His, sing and dance on His Glory.

Pavan empirAn pani mAmadikkaNNi viNNOr perumAn
civan empirAn ennai ANDukoNDAn en ciRumai kaNDum
avan empirAn enna nAn aDiyEn enna ipparisE
puvan empirAn teriyum parisu Avadu iyampukavE.

Kannappar

In the 63rd verse of *ShivAnandalahari*, Shankara cites as his model devotee a legendary figure known by the name of Kannappar in the Tamil world. Kannappar was a hunter, untouched by any civilised behaviour either secular or religious. But somehow he had got into his head that the stone lingam of *Shiva* which he had seen was verily the God of the Universe and that to propitiate this lingam by offering flowers and eatables and to bathe the lingam with river water were the greatest acts of devotion pleasing to the Lord. Every day he used to visit the place where the lingam was seen and worship it in the manner he chose fit. His manner of worship was anything but refined. With his bow on his shoulder, one hand carrying some bilwa leaves, the other hand carrying some meat, which was his daily food, and a mouthful of the water of the Swarnamukhi river he approached the Lord daily, cleared

the place of all old flowers by his sandal-clad feet (the hunter was so naïve that he did not know even the elementary culture of his religion which tabooed the wearing of sandals in the sannadhi of a temple deity), offered the bilwa leaves from his left hand, spat the mouthful of water on the lingam, as a token of ritual bathing, and offered the meat which he had not only brought but just then tasted to see whether it was edible. This was going on for several days. The priest who was doing the daily worship to the lingam in the traditional manner noticed every day that whatever flowers he had offered the previous day had all been trampled upon and there was the further sacrilege of strewn meat in front of the Lord. The priest started secretly observing the goings-on and was furious to note the sacrilegious acts of the hunter at such a sacred spot as the precincts of the deity. Afraid to accost the hunter because of the latter's patently aggressive appearance, but at the same time very much worried, the priest prayed to the Lord to show him the way. The Lord appeared in his dream and told him not to underestimate the devotion of the hunter and he should observe the strange drama that would take place the next day. The next day at the appointed time the priest witnessed a scene which has now become history, enshrined as one of the greatest miracles sported by the Lord.

And that takes us to the denouement of the Kannappar story and the hair- raising leelA of the Lord. As usual the priest had decorated the formless *Shiva*-lingam as if it had a face. The two eyes, nose, mouth and ears had all been clearly marked. On that day the hunter was approaching the Lord with his strange (but usual) accompaniments - the bow on the shoulder, with a quiver of arrows on the back, the bilwa leaves in one hand and the meat (this day it was pork) in the other hand, both to be offered to the Lord in respectful obedience. As he was approaching the site, with his mouthful of the holy river water, he saw a horrible sight. From the right eye of the Lord blood was trickling down the cheeks. The devotee was struck with pity and remorse. He threw away everything that he was carrying and tried to prevent the flow of blood from the deity's face by wiping it off. But it would not stop! He ran hither and thither to find some herbs from the forestry, brought some, applied them to the bleeding eye, but lo!, to no effect. He did not know what to do. At last the thought struck him. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth; let me pluck my eye and offer it to Him, thought the hunter, in all seriousness. He immediately pulled out one of his arrows, plucked one of his eyes with it and stuck it up at the place from where the blood was pouring out. And the bleeding stopped!

The hunter was enthralled. But his enthralment did not last even a few minutes, because another miracle happened. The other eye of the Lord, His left eye, now started bleeding! Here comes the historic response of the ideal bhakta. He decided to sacrifice his own other eye also for the Lord. Before he did this, his rational intelligence was alert enough to tell him that he would not be able to locate the position of the Lord's left eye, once he plucked his own remaining eye also. So he did a most wonderful thing. He placed his left foot on the *Shiva* Lingam and by the tip of his sandal-clad foot held on to the location of the Lord's left eye, when, lo and behold, the Lord appeared before him in person and there were rains of flowers from the heavens. The Lord not only appeared in person but extended His hand and prevented the devotee from executing his horrendous self-sacrifice. It was at this point the priest also came out from his hiding place of hiding from

where he had been watching the entire drama with great awe and wonder. The Lord blessed the hunter, gave him the sight of the lost eye, and announced to him that he would hereafter be known as Kannappar - meaning, the one who stuck his eye on the Lord's face -- and after living his full life on Earth he would reach Eternal Bliss of *moksha* at the Lord's feet.

Shankara refers to this episode in Verse 63 of his *Shiva*nanda-lahari and cites the hunter's devotion as the model of *bhakti*. What cannot *bhakti* do in its ecstasy?, asks Shankara.The remnants of the once-tasted meat becomes naivedya (eatable offering to the divine) for the Lord! The saliva-mixed waterheld in the mouth becomes holy water for the abhisheka (ritual bath) of the Lord!! The sandalled foot which had travelled all over the dirt and filth of the forest becomes the indicator for locating the forehead of the Lord !!! Is this not the Ultimate of *bhakti*? Each of these is a sacrilege. But this devotee who had such an intense *bhakti* towards the Lord, in his ecstasy, moves from one impiety to anothwer. Commentators who have written about this verse of Shankara have seen esoteric meanings in it, particularly in the gradations of the above three actions of Kannappar. His devotion is surely not an ordinary devotion. It is *viSesha-bhakti* (devotion special) or tIvra-*bhakti* ('*tIvra*' means intense, fervent, powerful) as opposed to the *sAmAnya* (= common-place) *bhakti* which is ritual ridden. Even this *tIvra-bhakti*, the commentators say, have three gradations as is coming out of the first three lines of this four-line verse, each one describing one of the 'sacrileges' of Kannappar. The first one is *sAmAnya-tIvra-bhakti*. He offers the meat to the Lord, but only after tasting a bit of it to see whether it tastes well. But here the assumption is the portion of the meat which is not yet tasted must be of the same quality as the one which has been tasted; it is only an inference and it could be wrong. To that extent the intensity of the *bhakti* is only ordinary.

At a higher level is the *madhyama-tIvra-bhakti*, that is, the *bhakti* of middle-level intensity, exemplified by Kannappar's act of spitting out the mouth-held river water on the Lord as if it was an abhisheka. The Lord is the bliss of *Brahman* and is represented by the word '*tat*' in the Grand Pronouncement - *tat tvam asi* -, which identifies the 'tat' representing *Brahman* and the '*tvam*' representing the individual soul. The mouth-heldwater represents the bliss of the individual soul. Kannappar's spitting it out on the Lord esoterically signifies that the bliss of *Brahman* imprisoned in 'You' (=tvam) is merged in the bliss of *Brahman* (the 'tat' of the Grand Pronouncement) represented by the *Shiva*-lingam here. But still at this level, the analysis goes on, the distinction between the 'You' and the 'That' remains.

In the highest level, which may be called the *tIvra-tIvra-bhakti* - *bhakti* of the highest order intensity - even this distinction of 'you' and 'that' vanishes. Man's greatest enemy is the ego. This is actually a superimposition by our ignorance on the Self which resides within. There are two kinds of this superimposition. One is the attachment to the lower self - technically called *tAdAtmya-adhyAsa*. The other is the attachment to everything that one calls 'mine' - this is called samsarga-adhyAsa. Both kinds of superimposition have to be eradicated in order to reach the identity of this individual soul with the *paramAtmA*. When Kannappar's *bhakti* takes him on to the stage where he places his sandal-clad foot

on the forehead of the Lord all distinctions of 'me' and 'mine' had vanished for him. Otherwise he would not have done what he did. This is ultimate experience of oneness with God. It is this stage, not experience, that is described as the goal of *bhakti* and *jnAna*. That is why Shankara says this devotee is a model. It is not surprising that Kannappar is taken as one of the 63 Nayanmars.

Tirumoolar

Perhaps two of the greatest mystics that India has produced in its long history belong to the Tamil region. One was Sadasiva Brahmendra. The other was Tiru-moolar, the more ancient one, a great saint, included in the list of 63 Nayanmars, who is traditionally allotted a date of 3000 B.C. but is assigned to the period between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E. by scholars. His original name was Sundarar who lived as an enlightened ascetic right at the feet of the Lord *Shiva* in His heavenly abode in Kailas, beyond the Himalayas. His contribution to posterity is the great work tirumandiram, consisting of 3000 verses, given out by him spontaneously every now and then when he came back to consciousness from his trance. The beauty of it is that he came back to consciousness only once a year! There is an interesting legend about this which has to be told.

The ascetic Sundarar once came down from the Himalayas and walked all the way down to South India to meet another great Saint Agastyar who is considered as the father of the Tamil language. In his wanderings he came across a herd of cows wailing and bellowing near a dead body. On examination he found that it was a cowherd who had died of snake-bite and the cows missed him rather badly. His ascetic dispassionate mind took compassion on the cows and he decided to humour them. He cast off his own body in a safe place in the hollow of a trunk, entered the body of the cowherd and lo and behold, the cowherd, Moolan by name, woke up. The cows and 'Moolan' (the saint in Moolan’s body) went home that evening. But the wife of the cowherd Moolan created problems because the ‘Moolan’ that had returned in the evening was totally indifferent to her. Finally a scene was created and the villagers of the neighbourhood had to intervene. When they all discovered that ‘Moolan’ had so cataclysmically ‘changed’ to a totally disinterested person as far as worldly affairs were concerned, they gave up and allowed ‘Moolan’ to go his way. He returned to the forest where he had left his original body so that he may ‘re-enter’ his body but did not find it there because some passers-by had already cremated it. Thus was the great Sundarar of Kailas imprisoned in the body of cowherd Moolan for ever.

Sundarar took this inconvenience as God’s will and continued his meditation remaining in that body. He came to be known from that time as tiru-moolar – the holy Moolan, the ending in ‘r’ signifying respect in the Tamil language. He was in such deep trance that he woke up only once a year and every time he woke up he gave out one stanza reflecting his spiritual experience, mood and enlightenment. This is the story of the birth of the massive work Tirumandiram, which is actually a spiritual encyclopaedia. It contains a synthesis of all knowledge right from the Upanishadic times down to the then-modern days of devotional revival, goes through all the maze and mystery of yoga and tantra, contains very strong criticisms of ritualistic idolatry, pours out forthright condemnations

of external gymnastics of occult practices, and expounds the esoteric significance of almost every kind of ritual and tradition. It is profound to the core, set in simple and cryptic style. The lilting Tamil in most of the verses can be enjoyed if you know the language. Like the Upanishads it admits of several meanings at the same time. The massiveness of the whole work does not admit of any justifiable summary. However, here are just a few samples, too tiny a selection to be representative of the massive work but still they can give the brilliance of the gem that is known as tirumandiram:

The child played ecstatic with his elephant proud,
He cared not it was made of wood,
Unplayful Man beheld but a lump of wood,
He missed, alas! The elephant's form;

Even so, the Elements hide the Real from our sight,
But the Mystic's eye pierces through the Elements and gets at – God.

They are fools who say: Control the five senses,
Even among the Immortals, none there is who can do so.
Lest, by controlling the senses I become inanimate,
I acquired the Wisdom enabling me not to struggle with sense-control.

In plenty do give to the deity housed in a temple
But that does not relieve the misery of a living being;
Instead, do something to relieve that misery,
That reaches, for sure, the deity of the temple.

Once I thought the body was something vulgar and mean,
But now I know that inside the body and only through it,
Can I behold the Absolute.

What bliss I experienced, let the whole universe get it,
The sky-high Word of the Scriptures, if revealed,
This resident of the body, let it cognize;
The more it gets to it the more the enlightenment.

I looked and searched for two things;
One was myself and the other was my self.
Maybe myself was not different from my self,
The Self within me told me so; and that
Was how I got rid of the memory of me and myself.

Do good to others, all honours are thine;
The Divinity above will reward you for sure.
Alas, innumerable are those that know not
This simple path to the Divine;
And they slip down, ever and ever.

For the Sanctum of the heart the body is the Temple;
For the enshrined Divinity, the Word is the Gate.
For the discerning Mind the Soul is the Blessed God;
Disguised by the Light of the five Senses mischievous.

The twelve Vaishnava Alvars

Orthodox opinion places the earliest of the Alvars, the Poygai Alvar, Bhudattalvar, and Peyalvar in the third millenium B.C.E. The one held in greatest esteem is however, the fifth in the chronology, Nammalvar (Shatagopar, being another name). The collection of devotional poetry composed by these twelve is considered to be the cream of Vaishnava philosophy. Besides these four just named, the others include

- Perialvar who delighted in worshipping the Lord as mother, nurse, devotee and lady love;
- Andal, the divine gift to Perialvar in the form of a daughter, who sang the Tiruppavai, a most beautiful string of 30 verses giving expression to the purest love of God, on whom she set her heart, like the *gopis* of yore, and ultimately merged in him;
- Tirumangai-Alvar, lured away by the Lord Himself from his lucrative profession of a highway robber, who later spent sixty years of his life building the vast and lofty temple complex of Sri Ranganatha in Srirangam and who travelled through the length and breadth of India, contributing to 1100 Prabandhams out of the 4000;
- Tondar-adippodi-alvar, who had earlier been infatuated with a temple danseuse and then, by Lord Ranganatha’s Grace, was redeemed to a spiritual life of devotion
- Madhurakavi Alvar, who discovered his *Guru* in Nammalvar and showed that his *bhakti* of the Bhagavata (Nammalvar) was greater than his *bhakti* of the Bhagavan Himself.

Nammalwar

One of the greatest of god-intoxicated devotees, Nammalvar (a Tamil name, pronounced *nammALvAr*), is the ‘soul’ of the twelve vaishnava *ALvArs*. Like the Buddha who appeared in the northernmost part of India and finally engulfed not only India but Asia and the whole world by his teachings, Nammalvar was the star of the southernmost part of India whose work engulfed the whole world of Vaishnavism and beyond. Tradition gives him the date 3102 B.C. i.e., the beginning of the *kali-yuga*; but scholars give him a date from the 7th century to the ninth century C.E. He must have been born fully enlightened because as a baby he never cried or suckled and never opened his eyes. He is considered foremost in the line of all ‘prapannas’, that is, of all those who have

surrendered to the Lord. He is therefore known as '*prapanna-santAna-kUTastha*' in Shri Vaishnava theology.

It appears he was in this state for as long as sixteen years when another *ALvAr* Madhura-kavi by name, who was himself in such a state of high spiritual evolution that he asked him the 'right' questions and made him speak and took him for his AcArya. Nammalvar consented to being his *guru*, instructed him in the secret doctrines of Vaishnavism and thereafter could not resist the urge of singing about God and trumpeting about Him. We owe it to Madhurakavi for setting them to music. Though Nammalvar did not visit any of the 108 *divyadesam* temples talked about in the Vaishnava religion it appears from his works he must have had the vision of all the *archa* forms in the temples he had glorified in his hymns. His contribution of four works to the four thousand *prabandhams* includes the entire fourth thousand and part of the third thousand (together totalling 1352 verses); these works are *tiruvAymozhi, tiruviruttam, tiruvAsiriam and periya tiruvandadi.* In the Vaishnava canon these four represent in the Tamil language the four Sanskrit vedas, respectively, *the SAmaveda, Rgveda,Yajurveda and atharvanaveda.* He poured the cream of these vedas into his songs of scintillating Tamil and matchless poetry that came out of his deep mystic experience. The subject matter was certainly the five principles, namely, the Lord, the soul, the means, the end, and the obstacles to spirituality. Through all this ran a thread of the acme of devotion to Lord Krishna. Whatever Krishna ate, whatever He drank, whatever betel He chewed was the dearest to the saint. The supreme object of life was to be at the Lord's lotus feet and to serve him eternally in blissful love. Therefore seek Him all your life, praise Him, surrender to Him, speak of His glories and exploits, revel in His majesty and continue the recitation of His names. This was his message to the world at large.

enakkE Atchey ekkAlattum enRu en manakkE vandu iDaivIdu inRi manni
tanakkE Aga enaikkoLLum IdE enakkE kaNNanai yAn koL chiRappE
Makes me serve him all the time and everywhere; Anchors me thus by seating himself in my mind; Swerves me not by gracing me in his service alone; Krishna's wish is my wish, my pleasure, my glory.

7. Twelve Gems of Superlative Devotion

India has been spiritually very fortunate in that, in addition to the long lineage of mystic masters that it had over the centuries and in continuation of the 75 unique apostles of God-intoxication that it was blessed with, there have been, even during the second millenium C.E., countless divine integrators who enriched the thought processes, religious practices and inner vision of its people. From the (chronologically) beginningless and endless chain of such gems of superlative devotion, we select just twelve outstanding examples, whose contribution to the spiritual archives of India is actually for the good of all mankind.

The life of each one of these **twelve gems of superlative devotion** is itself a message of the divine. Charged by their spirituality their words carry more weight than any

exposition by ordinary mortals who look up to them as the role models of *bhakti*. We shall just give a brief note on the life and achievements of each of them.

Namdev

Namdev (1270-1350) (?) is said to be a reincarnation (Avatara) of Uddhava of the *PurANA*s. Uddhava was one of the closest friends of Lord Krishna and at the same time a foremost devotee of the Lord. The 24 chapters in the eleventh skanda of SrImad-BhA. which constitute the Uddhava-*Gita* is what the Lord spoke to Uddhava. It is one of the most authentic expositions next only to the B.G. itself, of Hindu philosophy straight from the horse's mouth. When Krishna was taking leave of Uddhava to leave his mortal coil, Uddhava refused to part with Him. But Krishna prevailed upon him to take things as they come and to proceed to BadarikASrama for doing penance till the end of his life -- which he did.

The exact dates of Namdev are not known. We do not even know whether there have been two Namdevs who have been mixed up in the chronology. The stories about Namdev relate to any time between the 12th and 14th centuries. Originally a tailor by profession, Namdev spent his life propagating the *bhakti* movement in Maharashtra, composing abhangs both in Marathi and Hindi. In one version of his biography, we are told that as a youth he was a reputed spendthrift and a sluggard. He fell in with a gang of thieves, killed and robbed people until he came under the influence of a saint (perhaps Jnanesvar) who turned him from his evil life and the idolatry of his ancestral faith, to the devotion of Vithoba of Pandarpur. Here is another legend about him. As a child, in the absence of his parents who were away at Varanasi, he offered food to the family idols and prayed that they partake of the food. He took his parent's instructions literally and insisted that he would not take the food until the idol did so. Lo and behold, the idol appeared before him in flesh and blood and partook of the food. This was a daily event until the parents returned from their pilgrimage and would not believe it had happened.

But all biographies affirm that he was a great universalist. He condemned caste, polytheism and idolatry and pleaded first for service to mankind and, secondly, dedicating oneself to God. What is needed, according to him, is constant prayer. Prayer can work miracles. Namdev was a great saint as well as a great poet. His family consisted of more than a dozen members. All of them turned poets. The vow of Namdev to compose a hundred crore (a crore is 10 million) *abhangs* was more than fulfilled by all of them, particularly by his attendant Janabai. The abhangs show genuine marks of rare beauty, sweet melody, naivity. direct appeal and spontaneous depth of feeling. In one of his innumerable songs, he sings, 'As a bee's heart might be set upon the fragrance of a flower or as a fly might take resort to honey, so does my mind cling to God'. The all-absorbing devotion exuded by even the thousand or so *abhangs* that had survived, is unbeatable. Namdev made vigorous and propagandic tours in the cause of the BhAgavata Dharma. His enchanting KIrtanas carried his fame far and wide in his own days. He had the privilege of being quoted in the Granthsaheb of *Guru* Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Namdev belonged to a galaxy of poet-saints who came from different castes and whose lyrical outbursts are very popular throughout the length and breadth of the Maharashtra

region. These were Gora, the potter, Sena, the barber, Samvata the gardener, Chokha, the outcaste, Narahari, the goldsmith and Joga the oilman.

Kabir

In the 14th century there lived a great saint by name Swami RamAnanda. Drawing inspiration from the message of universal love preached by Sri Ramanuja-AcArya three centuries earlier, he changed the face of spiritual India by turning it in the direction of simple *bhakti*, away from ritual and caste-ridden rigidity. His most outstanding disciple was Kabir (1398 – 1518), India's greatest symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. Kabir accompanied RamAnanda on pilgrimages throughout India and in the process imbibed the revolutionary spirit of the master. Kabir’s lucid lyrics of devotion, for the first time composed in the local language, Hindi, rather than in elitist Sanskrit, reached the remotest villages throughout the country. He was a rebel against everything unspiritual and against all ritualistic norms in both Hinduism and Islam. He strongly advocated respect for, and the oneness of, all religions. Nobody knew of his parentage because he was picked up as a baby by his foster parent, a weaver by profession and a Muslim by faith. He preached the greatness of the name Ram, still remaining a Muslim. He taught nirguNa *bhakti*, i.e., the devotion of the Transcendental Absolute, without form, without attributes. His knowledge was not the outcome of any study of the scriptures, unlettered as he was, but it all arose from his own personal experience. He preached against all exclusiveness, privileges and priestcraft. He strongly condemned caste, circumcision and idolatry but simultaneously believed in rebirth and release from samsAra. He emphasized on God’s Grace as most essential for Illumination. As an experimentor with truth, he spent much of his time in prayer and contemplation. And when he spoke he spoke out his mind fearlessly. His songs reverberate with his spiritual experiences and visions. Most of his sayings were expressed in brief form and have the appearance of proverbs or folk wisdom, rather than deliberate compositions. For instance, to make the point that God is all-pervading, he asks: Tell me my friend, ‘Is the heart in the beloved or the beloved in the heart?’.

Kabir’s teachings may be summarised, if at all they can be, by saying that apart from God there is nothing animate or inanimate with a separate existence. Every insignificant creature has its share of the Existence of the Absolute in itself. Man does not realise this because of his elusive nature and the deception (*mAyA*) caused by appearances. Once he frees himself from this *mAyA* he realises that he is in all and all are in him and there is nothing else but he. But this identity cannot be established by reasoning. One has to take recourse to sahaj and transcend the coarse mental process. The word sahaj means the state of diverting the senses from its morbidities to God. In the lake of sahaj, there are only waves of love. The soul then sports with the Lord in that lake. ‘The lock of error shuts the gate, open it with the key of Love’ says Kabir. With his tremendous popularity he could have easily established a sect himself, but he did not, (though his followers did, after his death) nor did he accept any sectarian thinking.

Chaitanya

Chaitanya (1486 – 1534 C.E.) - also known as Sri Krishna Chaitanya or Gouranga, grew up as Pandit Nimai in the district of Nadia, Bengal. He was then a cantankerous, carping scholar-teacher who could beat any scholar of repute visiting that part of the country in disputation. At the age of 22, during a visit to Gaya, he was suddenly initiated into the *bhakti* path by Iswarpuri and from then on Chaitanya spent a life of humility and divine bliss. Reciting and singing the names Hari, Govinda and Krishna became his only occupation.. He preached only the importance of *nAma-saMkIrtana* and that the ferevent devotion of Radha to Krishna was the best example of *bhakti* for all devotees to follow. The first poetic expression of the Radha-Krishna tradition was in the *gIta-govinda* of Jayadeva (12th cen. C.E.). The principal character in that love-poem was Radha, the celebrated milk-maid of Brindavan, who was the beloved of Krishna, who moved no step except towards Krishna and who spoke no word except prayer to Krishna. She saw and heard only Krishna. She spoke only of Him, to Him, for Him, whoever might be near her. Krishna fitted her heart entirely. Jayadeva's poem is held in high respect and is sung all over India particularly in congregatory singing of bhajans, the singing often reaching heights of supreme ecstasy. It was Chaitanya's mysticism and conviction about the Radha-Krishna theme that popularised Radha as a Goddess and as an Avatara of Lakshmi. His memory of his extraordinary sense of God's presence with him, descriptions of his state of ecstasy and vairious extraordinary and supernatural incidents that are said to have taken place during his life led his contemporaries to treat him as an Avatara (of Lord Krishna himself) even in his own lifetime.

Disciples gathered around Chaitanya both at Nadia and at Puri where he settled, and through them, he worked miracles, the greatest being that of converting to the *bhakti* path any one, be he a believer or not,who came into his sphere of influence even once. The sincerity of the overpowering religious experience that he radiated could not but move millions, scholars and laymen alike, irrespective of caste or creed, to partake in the ecstasy of *nAma-saMkIrtana*, which took place unceasingly. As the authority for the importance of *nAma-saMkIrtana* over other paths like study of vedanta, etc. he used to quote one verse from *bRhan-nAradIya-PurANA*, which was taught to him, he said, by his *guru*. It says: The name of Hari and the name of Hari alone is the path for Release in the kali age; there is no other path, indeed no other path.

harer-nAmaiva nAmaiva nAmaiva mama jIvanaM / kalau nAstyeva nAstyeva nAstyeva gatir-anyathA //

He left no writings for posterity. He only showed by his own example and by his *saMkIrtana* how deep, intense and enjoyable *bhakti* could be. He proved that religious worship need not verge on the funereal, but it could be the joyous funeral of all sorrows. He preached that the most important quality on the spiritual path is deep sincerity and devotion. It is not the number of years one spends on the path that counts but how deeply one tries to find God. It was Chaitanya who identified for posterity the locations of Krishna's exploits in Brindavan. It was he who unearthed during his tours of South India, two important devotional works, namely, *brahma-saMhitA* (a summary of BhA.) and *Krishna-karNAmRtaM*. His life is the inspiration and motivating force for the modern

Krishna-Consciousness movement of the past four decades. For more on the philosophical aspects of the Chaitanya school see the Section on 'The non-Absolutist School).

Purandaradasa

Purandara-dasa (1480-1564) is held by orthodox opinion to be an Avatara of Sage Narada, the wandering divine singer of yore. He was born in Karnataka in a rich household and enhanced his wealth manyfold by his business acumen. His spiritual enlightenment came by a miraculous intervntion by the Lord Himself. Then he started on a long pilgrimage and travelled throughout the length and breadth of India. He finally settled in Pandarpur in Maharashtra. He was one of the earliest composers of devotional songs in the vernacular. He is in fact considered as the originator of Carnatic music. His compositions on Lord Vithala of Pandarpur, all set to music by himself, number more than a couple of thousands. His compositions are sung in almost all religious congregations in the South and in all music performances. The Lord put him to the severest test by subjecting him to a nasty scandal and finally, when the law was all set to have him publicly whipped, at the crucial moment, the whip was simply snatched away by the Lord Himself in the form of the Vithala idol of Pandarpur and Purandaradasa stood redeemed.

Eknath

Eknath (1533 - 1599) was a great admirer of Jnanesvar of the 12th century (or the 13th?) who was a great poetic genius and mystic saint of Maharashtra and who established the BhAgavata tradition in Maharashtra. It was Eknath who brought out the first authentic edition of Jnanesvari, Jnanesvar's *magnum opus*. Eknath was a brahmin, but he set an example by not observing caste distinctions, against which he preached vehemently. His own commentary in 18,800 verses on the eleventh skanda of the SrImad-BhA. is called Ekanatha-BhA.. It is simultaneously a great spiritual treatise as well as a literary masterpiece.

It is said of Eknath that the Lord Himself was so fascinated by the *bhakti* of Eknath that He appeared before him as a boy of twelve or so and sought to be taken in as a resident disciple. He was so taken and thus began the unique lIlA of God wherein for a full period of twelve years the Lord remained as a boy called 'kandiyA krishna' doing all sorts of services to the *Guru*' such as: bringing water from the river for *pUjA*, doing errands of all types, massaging the feet, keeping all accessories ready for *pUjA*, fanning the *Guru* Eknath while he delivered lessons or lectures for his disciples, and so on. At the end of full years by a fortuitous circumstance the unsuspecting Eknath got the revealing news from a total stranger that the lad known as his disciple krishna was none other than the Lord of Dwaraka. But the revelation came just late, because, the Lord, who had stayed in Eknath's house all these years, had just then disappeared!

Tulsidas

Tulsi (1497 ?-1623 ?) is the author of the retelling, in immortal Hindi verse, (actually in awadhi dialect, though Sanskritized) of Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana under the title *Ram-charita-mAnas* which has in effect replaced the original in North India and may well be called the Bible of the masses wherever Hindi is spoken. Tulsi's is a household name and millions have been inducted into *bhakti* by the all-pervasiveness of the *bhakti* spirit in this masterpiece. It thus rendered a great service to the Indians submerged under the flood of Islamic conquest. He wrote many other devotional works, which, together with his magnum opus, leave us in no doubt about his superiority as a poet and religious thinker. His writings further display a keen sense of understanding of the human mind and so have a universal appeal for all mankind. In his own life, enlightenment and initiation came to him in a unique manner when he was taunted by his wife for his excessive, almost crazy, attachment to her. From then on he became the apostle of *bhakti* towards his *ishta devatA*, Ram, for whose *darSan*, he yearned and meditated for years. Inspite of his exclusive devotion to Ram, he adored all the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. But Ram as the supreme manifestation of Absolute *Brahman*, and Tulsi as the humblest devotee of Ram reverberate through all his writings. His depiction of Bharata's Rama-*bhakti* is the greatest and purest example of devotion to Rama. Tulsi ranks next only to Vyasa and Valmiki in terms of extent of influence and its persistence over centuries.

Bhattattiri

Bhattatiri (1560 ? - 1650 ?) known for his lofty devotion and erudite scholarship is the author of *Na.*, a Sanskrit work containing 1036 four-line verses in different metres turning out to be a masterly epitome of the SrImad BhA. containing 18000 verses. The fervour of devotion and the poetic grace demonstrated by the author throughout have contributed not a little to the popularity of the work as authentic as Vyasa's BhA. for purposes of divine merit . Born in Meppathur in Kerala, he was recognised as a prodigy in Sanskrit literature and grammar by the time he was sixteen. He is the author of forty major and minor works. *Na.* is his *magnum opus*. The circumstances in which it came to be composed form a contributing factor to its importance as a devotional hymn. His *Guru* who turned him into the path of *bhakti* was struck by paralysis in 1587. Bhattatiri took the illness on himself and then sat before the Lord in the temple of *Guru*vayoor for 100 days continuously composing this great poem, about ten stanzas each day. The subject was the sports of the Lord *Vishnu*, with special emphasis on the descent as Lord Krishna. On the 100th day he was cured of his illness and he must have also received on that day a blissful darSan of the Lord of *Guru*vayoor, namely Krishna. The devotional sentiment coupled with the highest philosophy that he imports into his poem has moved millions of devotees from his time to such an extent that even in modern times there are thousands of households, especially in the southern part of the country, who would not sit for their main meal of the day until they have finished recitation of at least one chapter of this great devotional hymn.The conflict about the antithesis between the impersonal and personal facets of God would vanish if one studies *Na.* carefully and understands how Bhattatiri can extol both the facets to the skies equally strongly.

The Ultimate Reality is non-dual. Reality is only one – in the sense there is Reality and Reality alone. To name it by something is an under-statement. To give it a form again circumscribes it. It is actually nameless and formless. It just exists. **It is Consciousness; it is Bliss**, say the scriptures. This non-duality that is the central core of Advaita philosophy therefore identifies the Supreme Self (that transcends everything) with the innermost Self (that is immanent in every being). If God or the Supreme Reality does not have a separate status other than our Selves, then who is to worship whom? Hence the concept of Bhakti, or Devotion, seems to contradict the Oneness inherent in Advaita. This apparent conflict may be easily resolved by studying *Na.*.

That the Ultimate is non-dual there is no question. But to be able to realise it as a fact of experience one has to go through the processes of Bhakti of God with form and content, with name and description, with qualities and adjuncts. Such a God is known by the technical name of *saguNa Brahman*, in contrast to the *nirguNa Brahman* which is the formless and nameless Absolute. The genius of Bhattattiri saw to it that none of the central points of Bhagavatham were missed in his rendering. Not only were they not missed but they have also been focused by him with the powerful emphasis and enchanting poetry that is characteristic of him. One really begins to understand the Bhagavatham only after a study of *Na.*. One can select several verses from *Na.* to substantiate this thesis.

Bhattattiri's conception of Bhakti emphasizes the *nirguNa* aspect of the Ultimate in no uncertain terms, even while he expatiates on the worship of the visible form. His rationale is summed up in verse no.10 of the 99th Dasaka. The Absolute Being is not manifest to the senses or the intellect. It is therefore difficult to grasp or attain to. But when it is manifest as Krishna it is like the wavy surface of the Ocean of Blissful spirit, definite, clear and easy to grasp. Therefore one resorts to the worship of the Krishna form that is lovable and most captivating by its sweet beauty and other blessed attributes. The wave-ocean analogy is standard in Advaita. We cannot 'see' the ocean except as waves. In the same way *nirguNa Brahman* cannot be seen, conceived, visualised or imagined except as *saguNa Brahman*, that is, except as the *mUrtis* installed in temples.

But why does the limitless Infinite 'descend' as it were into the limited Finite? This common question is referred to in the scriptures as well as by saints as an unanswerable question and they escape into poetic raptures to venture an answer. Bhattattiri says: How else do we get the thrilling experience of taking delight in the bewitching Form of the Lord? (Dasaka 1 - Verse 7).

Brahman is the causeless Cause. To know this is to get out of this *samsAra*. (98 - 6). What you see is not what is. What you see not is what you should see! (98 - 7). He is the base of all this world of manifestation. He is both the material and the efficient cause of it. Into Him it dissolves. He manifests as the whole world but none-the-less transcends them all and forms the light of Consciousness by which and to which they are revealed. He is far beyond all word-descriptions or even mental conceptions. His true nature is not recognized either by the divines or the great sages, much less to others. (98 - 1).

Blessed are those who see It, think and hear of It. They are the ones who can see the Invisible ‘through’ the visible universe. (1 - 3).

He is the Master-Controller. (98 - 8). He transcends Time and Space. The three gunas together constitute the three worlds. He is the three worlds. He is the three Divinities of the Trinity, all rolled into one. He is the One who is sung ecstatically by the three Vedas. He is the consciousness behind the three states of awareness. He remains ever unchanged. The concepts of ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ do not apply to Him. He is the One to be propitiated by the three Yoga-paths. (98 - 9) The only way to describe Him is by negations. (98 - 10).

The very idea of a second entity in existence introduces fear and insecurity. (91 - 3). *But in practical life one has to accept duality and multiplicity. The concept of non-duality has to be only in one’s attitude.* The practical application of it is possible only for the few *JIvanmuktas* (= the liberated while still living) about whom history has select examples like **Sadasiva Brahmendra**, **Ramana Maharishi** and **Ramakrishna Paramahamsa** and **Kanchi mahA-swamigal**. Ordinary seekers can only pray to God to be given that equanimous view of everything that we see, hear or touch. (94 - 6). Be it friend or foe, be it human or animal, can we see all alike? This *samadrishti* is attainable only by Service – Service to God and Man. (91 - 6). So long as this equanimous view does not arise in the mind one has to keep striving and worshipping through the normal modes of devotion to forms and idols. (97 - 3). These four *shloka*s constitute the essence of the teaching of *Na.* for the layman. The basis of the teaching is Advaita pure and simple. The means recommended is Bhakti. *‘bhaktya mAm abhijAnIti’* says the Lord.

Several verses of Bhattattiri wax eloquent on the modalities of this Bhakti. These verses also represent some of the best of *Na.*. You have only to keep on doing your normal duties but with the undercurrent of devotion in your mind. You will never be let down nor will you have occasion to falter. (91 - 1). Just surrender every one of your actions to the Lord. Even if you are very low in spiritual evolution you will be considered by the Lord to be greater than even the best of the ‘brahmins’ who however have turned their face away from God. (91 - 2). It is the association with spiritually minded people that matters. Your spirituality will then grow, just as by associating oneself with the rich one gets the taste of riches. (91 - 4). What is the use of elaborate and noisy expressions of metaphysics if it is not to speak of the glories and majesties of God that are emotionally fulfilling? (94 - 7). In all these one recognises echoes of similar thoughts from the eleventh Skanda of Bhagavatham, almost in the same words .

Grant me, O Lord of *Guru*vayoor, pleads Bhattattiri, for him as well as for us who recite the *Na.*, that supreme Bhakti of the *gopis* who merged with you , not by acts of charity or ritual, not by fasting or penance, not by philosophical dialectics, nor by the so-called yoga but only by pure thought of constant association with you! (94 - 10).

Bhaskararaya

Bhaskara-raya (1690-1785) is the unquestioned authority for all questions pertaining to the worship of Mother Goddess. The worship of *Shakti* involves many hidden meanings of *mantra*s and coded passages. The Hindu religious world owes a lot to Bhaskara-raya for his writings on these meanings, revealed to Him by the Goddess Herself. Many a miracle in the life of Bhaskara-raya substantiate the fact of these revelations. His works are all very profound. They number more than forty and range from vedanta to poems of devotion, from logic and grammar to the labyrinths and nuances of the science of Tantric worship and commentaries on rare works to original compositions on rare subjects. Of these his commentary on the *lalitA-sahasranAma* and his scientific commentary on the SrI vidyA *mantra* are most well known.

Bhaskararaya was born in Bhaga in Maharashtra. His father was a great scholar who initiated the son in the scholarly traditions even at an early age. He was taken to Benares and put under the tutelaege of a renowned Pundit there. He was initiated into the Sri VidyA *mantra* (the most prestigious *mantra* of the Goddess) by *Guru Shiva*dutta Shukla of Surat. Later he toured the Gujarat region and won in debate several scholars of the Madhwa tradition. A disciple king of his invited him to the South and gifted him a whole village on the banks of the Cauvery. Bhaskara-raya made that village his headquarters for the rest of his life. It later came to be known as Bhaskararajapuram. During his stay there and in nearby towns the spiritual and psychic greatness of Bhaskara-raya got revealed through scores of miracles.

The Trinity of Carnatic Music

Thiagaraja (1767 - 1847), Shyama Sastri (1762 - 1827) and Muthuswamy Dikshidar (1775 - 1835) form the well-known Trinity.

Thiagaraja, the great celebrity in the world of Carnatic music was born in Tiruvarur but lived all his life in Tiruvaiyaru on the banks of the Kaveri, both places known for their traditions of learning and spirituality. He started composing devotional music even while in his teens. In him was seen the rare combination of a complete knowledge of philosophy, devotion, musicology and poetics and a talent of singing his own compositions in the most moving voice. Most of his compositions were in Telugu and were composed and sung while he was in trance. He would be thrilled at the very thought of the Lord. We owe the propagation of his songs to his pupils who came from far and wide. He would not sing the praises of mortal men for favour of riches and presents. He is said to have composed 24000 songs out of which 800 or so are extant. His songs have not only a great spiritual value and an excellent variety but a remarkable musical excellence, coming as they did as a natural climax in an age of giants at Tanjore. He introduced the technique of *sangati* in Carnatic music by which the composer already conceives the variations and finer modulations of a phrase. He did not strive hard to create his compositions. The poetic words came to him in simple and emotional language, coupled with elegance. The simplicity of style can be inferred from the hundreds of *kritis* of his which are easy enough even for beginners. Disciples flocked to

him, paired themselves and learnt the pieces then and there as and when they were spontaneously composed and sung by the saint-musician. They in their turn passed them on to worthy students and through them to the rest of the world.

The infinite excellences of the name, form, glory and majesty of Rama get infinitely multiplied by the traditional musical techniques which Thiagaraja imparted into his divine compositions and the nuances which he himself gave in singing them. According to Thiagaraja, God is the fittest object of music and music bereft of devotion is lifeless and useless. God protects those who combine divine love with music. 'I pray for nothing more than that my tongue should be given to continuous repetition of the name Rama' says Thiagaraja.

It was in the hands of Thyagaraja that the soft-flowing Telugu as a medium of music reached a high level with a distinct form and independent status. Lofty thoughts were clothed in simple words of lyrical sweetness. Though he employed the diction of the spoken language of the layman, the poet in him could evoke the entire gamut of emotions such as love, joy, pleasure, wonder, petulence, sorrow, disgust and reverence.

He lived to the ripe age of 80. Ten days before his demise he announced it to a congregation of friends. On the day previous to his *siddhi* he requested his disciples to conduct *akhanda-bhajan* – non-stop chanting of devotional songs – so that he would be immersed in the music of the names of the Lord ringing in his ears to his last breath. People gathered in large numbers to witness the miraculous event of light emanating from the skull of the saint and to perform the rites to his mortal remains on the banks of the Kaveri.

Shyama Sastri was (also) born in Tiruvaroor on April 26, 1762. The formal name given was Venkatasubrahmanya while the pet name was Shyama. Sound education in Sanskrit and Telugu ws given by father Viswanatha Iyer, who had the hereditary responsibility of doing Puja to Bangaru-Kamakshi of Tanjavoor. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the political turmoil due to Muslim invasions caused the Bangaru Kamakshi to move from north to south. After staying in several places, the idol reached Tanjavoor where a temple was built with the help of Tulaja Raja the then ruler of Tanjore, at the close of the 18th century. Viswanatha Iyer had the benefit of a munificent royal donation for managing the temple and the Pujas with great devotion. At his home also the daily routine of puja was strictly observed with extreme piety accompanied by hymns sung for the Devi. When Shyama was eighteen, one Swamiji known as Sangeethaswamy stayed for four months in Tanjavoor and taught music and intricacies of rhythm to his one and only disciple Shyama.

Among the Tamil-speaking Brahmin Smarta community, the honorific ‘Iyer’ is indicative of respectability. An ‘Iyer’ who is well-versed in the Vedas and observes codes laid down by the Shastras is styled a Sastri or a Dikshidar. A youngster however is not referred to as Iyer or Sastri. But Shyama in his early twenties won the admiration of one and all through his personal conduct, education and intellectual attainments and was always rfeferred to with respect as Shyama Shastri.

As advised by his guru, Shyama Shastri cultivated the friendship of the Tanjavoor Court musician Pachimariyam Adiyappiah, a Madhva Karnataka Brahmin, held in high esteem by musicians and composers -- who is universally remembered for his immortal creation of the Bhairavi varnam 'Viribhoni'. The spiritual fervour of Shyama Sastri and the intellectual eminence of Adiyappiah complemented each other by this association and Shyama Shastri grew into an enlightened personality very soon.

The duty of performing the daily puja to Bangaru Kamakshi devolved from father to son in the Shastri family. The practice of Devi worship and the Tantric mode of worship to the nine seats constituting the Shri chakra, was making Sastri's inner self harmonious and integrated. And this transcendent self-effacement poured itself out perennially in the form of musical compositions. He was probably the first major composer handling the worship of the Mother Goddess. However his *kritis* are not as popular as those of Thyagaraja, mostly because Sastri's style of music is of a type which cannot be mastered quickly and that was one of the reasons why he did not have many disciples. Further it appears he was a stern taskmaster who demanded more talent from his students. It was his son Subbaraya Sastry, whose intellect was equal to that of his father, and who himself had learnt from Thyagaraja and who was very much influenced by Muthuswamy Dikshidar, that many of Sastri's kritis were handed down to posterity. Of the two sons of Shyama Shastri, it is the younger son Subbaraya Shastri who held aloft the torch of the musical heritage of the father. Shyama Shastri produced in all about 300 compositions, most of them in Telugu, some in Sanskrit and a few in Tamil.

Muthuswamy Dikshidar was (also!) born in Tiruvarur in Tanjore District. His father Ramaswamy Dikshidar himself was a versatile composer whose famous compositions include long Ragamalikas, one on Goddess Meenakshi with 40 ragas. and one on Lord Venkateshvara of Tirupati with 48 ragas. Ramaswamy Dikshidar with his Sanskrit and Vaidic background led an austere life enriched with the practice of music. He had three sons Muthuswamy, Chinnaswamy and Baluswamy. The family spent some time in Manali, near Madras, which by that time had started playing an important part in the patronage of music. It was in Manali that Baluswamy learnt European violin. It is only after him, the use of violin as an accompaniment for Carnatic music gained vogue. During the same time Chidambaranatha Yogi took Muthuswamy to Kashi where Muthusamy had the opportunity to be exposed to Hindustani music. After five years Muthuswamy returned to the South, first to Tiruttani. That is where Lord Subrahmanya blessed him in the form of an elderly person putting sugarcandy in his mouth when he was in meditation. The first compositions (out of a total of 430) of Muthuswamy Dikshidar were born here, with the eight declensions of Sanskrit beginning with the Nominative, on Kumara. And Dikshidar took '*Guru-guha*' as the *mudra* in all his songs from then on. Then the family went on to Kanchi where they stayed for four years. Here Muthuswamy met the famous Upanishad Brahma yogin. Later they all went to Chidambaram and then on to Tiruvarur. At each place Muthuswamy composed songs on the deities of the places he visited; because being a Devi-worshipper, the Devi deities at each place inspired him to compose. The single largest group of songs by Muthuswamy Dikshidar is, however, on Thiagaraja and Kamalamba of Tiruvarur. While staying at Tiruvarur he regularly visited all the nearby shrines. His life was a continuous series of

pilgrimages. He helped to organise the music of the Thiagaraja temple. It is the practice of Nagaswaram artistes of the temple to play particular ragas and compositions of Dikshidar at specific places in the temple and at specific times of service and processions. The practice started in this period under the guidance of the Dikshidar himself.

The musical style of Muthuswamy Dikshidar is not simple; a correct rendering of his music is considered to be rather difficult. The sublime dignity in the music can be recognised even by the general public but to appreciate and understand the details of the intricacies of the rendering one has to spend hours of concentrated study. His compositions, in addition, are packed with details tagged on to the praise of the deity of the locality. Biographical data could be built up by following his travels and the songs composed in each place.

It was during his sojourn in Tanjore that Dikshidar came into contact with the other two members of the Carnatic music Trinity. At this time the two younger brothers left for Madurai. During Muthuswamy's visit to Madurai he learnt that Chinnaswamy had died and Baluswamy had left for Rameswaram. After a pilgrimage to Rameswaram Muthuswamy learnt that Baluswamy was in Ettayapuram, in Tirunelveli District. Ettayapuram is also famous for its patronage of musicians, dancers, poets and composers. On the way to Ettayapuram, Dikshidar halted at a place called Sattur where he found the countryside parched by failure of rains. A miracle is recorded of Dikshidar singing a new song ('*Anandamrita-karshiNi*') there and inducing rainfall. The raga itself is called Amrita-varshini, a creation of Dikshidar. There followed pilgrimages to Tiruchendur, Tiruvananthapuram, Guruvayoor and Sabrimala – each contributing to a wealth of compositions from the maestro. In 1834 on the day of the Dipavali festival, the end of Dikshidar came when he was in the midst of the worship of Devi.

Srila Prabhupada

Srila Prabhupada (1896–1977) was one of the foremost spiritual leaders of the twentieth century. The remarkable challenge that he undertook and successfully accomplished was the transformation of the most materialistic youth of the times – not just the orthodox and naïve believers of a gullible society of the East who grew up with hoary traditions of religious beliefs, but the rebelling anti-conformist westernised youth who were products of the luxury, affluence and license of the West -- not just a few, but literally thousands of them -- into the most godly personalities with the loftiest of spiritual and ethical ideals. This miraculous achievement has no parallel either in the past or in the present and very probably there would never be one in the future. This happened to be a marvel of just twelve years, precisely the last twelve years of his 82 years of life. It was all due to the fact that Prabhupada was an open book as an exemplary devotee of God, who would have been placed among the greatest of the Alvars or Nayanmars if only he had lived in ancient times. Coming in the lineage of Chaitanya mahAprabhu of the sixteenth century, he re-established the traditional *bhakti* school of Chaitanya in a totally modern context, by 'building a house in which the whole world can live'. Till he was seventy he struggled alone to implement his master's injunction of propagating the glories of Lord Krishna and transmitting the treasures of the SrImad BhA.. But even in the land where these had

been held, without any doubt, in superlative esteem by one and all, he could not succeed. Only three books were written by him. In the next twelve years he wrote sixty. Till he was seventy he initiated only one disciple. In the next twelve years a few thousands were initiated by him. . Till he was seventy the worldwide society of Krishna devotees was only in his dream. In the next twelve years not only did it come to fruition but it came to have more than one hundred centres all over the world. His unflinching and uncompromising devotion to the Supreme Transcendental Personality of Krishna made all this possible. He was the Lord's Gift to humanity at large.

Opulence, potency, fame, beauty, knowledge and dispassion are only some of the infinite qualities of the Supreme Personality that is Krishna , but each one of them is possessed by Him in infinite extent to the absolute degree. Not a leaf moves without the Will of Krishna. He is the Absolute *Brahman*. This declaration of the scriptures is the solid foundation for the movement now known all the world over as Krishna Consciousness, named as such by Prabhupada. Remaining faithful to the disciplic succession, that goes back to the days of Chaitanya, Prabhupada created a whole new international community of the young and old, male and female, scholars and laymen, all of them fully versed in the teachings of the B.G. and the BhA. and all of them fully convinced that no man-made system can cure the ills of the world, it is only the eternal reality of Krishna that will do it. The logical conclusion is the unceasing chanting by this ocean of devotees, singly and collectively, of the classic *mantra* :

Hare Krishna hare Krishna Krishna Krishna hare hare;
hare Rama hare Rama Rama Rama hare hare.

It is now the most popular *mantra* known the world over. But even till as late as the fifties of this century it was not known – and certainly not heard -- beyond the shores of India and even within India it was familiar only to those who had any contact with Hindu religious activities or bhajans. The ecstasy with which the Krishna Consciousness devotees dance and jump at the chanting of this *mantra* for hours together is a sight that should be marked as the greatest miracle of modern times for every one to watch. This ecstasy of divine bliss is not in something that you obtain with great effort after you reach a certain level of spiritual consciousness or after you enter the precincts of the divine worlds, but it is experienced right here, almost effortlessly, in the chanting of the hare Krishna *mantra* -- this is something which must have surprised even the demigods and angels in heaven.

Abhay, that was his name as a child, only played with idols and pictures of God. Abhay De as a youth struggled to bring his wife and children and his contemporaries into his world of *bhakti*. Sri BhaktivedantaSwami as the disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, struggled to find a sponsor for the popularisation of his manuscripts which he conceived, wrote, edited and typed for the benefit of this fallen humanity. But the spiritual revolution was still not coming. Taking his Master's prophecy of several years past as his only guidance and with total faith in Krishna he crossed the seas against heavy odds, his only property being a suitcase of manuscripts he had already written, two hundred three-volume sets, already printed, of the BhA. explained by him in his inimitable english, an

umbrella and a supply of dry cereal and with almost no money (just forty Indian rupees). The first few months of his American life must go down in the history of Devotees of the Lord as the worst torture (challenge!) to mind and body that any devotee ever experienced. He was frantically (but with hope and faith) looking for people who would listen to him not just once but repeatedly, people who would chant the transcendental name of God first at his bidding and then spontaneously, people who would live a life without illicit sex or gambling or intoxicants or meat, people who would live for Krishna. In looking for these he became a revolutionary in that he accepted their participation whether they chanted it as jazz, folk music or rock or Indian meditation. He had no government or other support, no sanction of a religious organization, no patron. As a total loner he planted the seed not only in a foreign soil, but that too in a completely unfriendly environment, whether of the weather or of the people. The American hippies were his first disciples. The major attraction to them was: his good food, even though unfamiliar, and a promise of reaching 'the high' and 'staying high' without drugs. They trusted him because he was the most sincere swAmi they had ever come across.

What started like this steamrolled, by the Lord's Grace, within the course of two years into an international movement, with a printing press of their own, with a few temple-like apartments on American soil, where there would be congregations at least three days a week, chanting almost every day, lectures by the swAmi, and certainly the writing work at the desk probably all the early hours of every morning by the divinely inspired ar*chit*ect of the whole scheme and unending dreams and explorations for the progress of the movement. Thereafter there was no looking back. The whirlwind tours of the swAmi started. As he said he never belonged to any single place, neither New York, nor Bombay nor even Brindavana. He belonged to Krishna. So he travelled wherever his devotees called him. One by one temples were coming up. Ratha-yatras, i.e., public processions of the sacred idols of the Lord displayed in gigantic chariots in all pomp and majesty were held in far-off cities of the world where they had never seen or thought of God in idols ever. Krishna's Grace brought sponsors; a Ford, a Harrison and many more. The records of the chant created record sales. The swAmi's BhA. kept continually rolling off the press. The books were sold in thousands by the devotees in marathon efforts, with the same persistence and devotion, perhaps more, as their master had shown in writing them all his life. Altogether he had written more than 60 books. A Book Trust was created. The earnings of the Book Trust became the major assets of the Krishna Consciousness Society. Temples for Radha-Krishna and Jagannath were coming up in almost every country of the world. The swAmi had circled the globe almost a dozen times. A new era of Krishna Consciousness had been heralded and had come to stay. His Mission was over. The call was now coming from Krishna for him. But he was working till the last moment. He left behind him a large and growing organisation of properties and monies intended one hundred per cent for the purpose of devotional service to Krishna. And he also left a legacy of spiritual consciousness and devotional life which will live as long as the memory of Krishna lives. This would change the course of history for all time. Having taught the world how to live, he also taught them how to die by breathing his last peacefully in Brindavan amidst the chanting of hare krishna *mantra* by numerous devotees and representatives of the hundred and odd temples around the world .

8. From Kanchi Mahaswamigal's Discourses on Advaita SAdhanA

[The source material for this section is Ra. Ganapathy's 'Deivathin Kural' Vol.6 in Tamil published by Vanathi Publisers, 4th edn.1998. The English translation is by this author (V.K.) as posted by him in the 'advaitin' yahoo-group mails in July 2006]

Topic: *ShraddhA* (Faith and Dedication)

In the sextad starting with 'shama' the next one is '*shraddhA*' (Faith/Dedication). When one is involved in something by the sheer conviction – not by any direct 'proof' -- that what the shAstras or the righteous ones say must be right, that is known as '*shraddhA*'. Compared to men, women stand higher in '*shraddhA*' – so long as they do not involve themselves in academic research. In fact, I think, even after their modern involvement in studies, they are still one step higher in *shraddhA*. Maybe in the days to come this will be different.

Shraddhaa leads to Belief (AstikyaM) as I already mentioned. Among those who have become non-believers, women are probably just one-fourth of the number of men. Even the wives of leaders of parties of non-believers, have faith in temples, austerities and worship. I think the '*shraddhA*' word is rightly feminine!

Right in the beginning when I talked about '*shraddhA*' I told you this topic will recur again at the end of the saadhanaa. We have now come to that second level '*shraddhA*', the higher grade one.

At this stage the seeker has taken several steps towards his spiritual maturity. To inquire and convince oneself what is eternal and what is ephemeral; to develop a dispassion towards the ephemeral; to quell the thoughtful mind by self control and convert it into an emptiness; to cultivate patience and tolerance – in all this he has made sufficient progress. So at this stage what is this shraddhA for? That is something to be there right at the beginning, when he was putting the foundation for all his sAdhanA. In the beginning when he was nowhere near any familiarity with spiritual conduct and regimen, there was a meaning in prescribing a shraddhA for him by saying, "This path does not allow intellectual proofs and verifications; many things have to be taken on faith from the shAstras and the words of the *Guru*". Now that he has taken significant steps towards spiritual progress, why bring the shraddhA back again? It is because, by the very fact of his progress gained upto now, there is danger of his losing the very faith that has brought him so far!

In the beginning he was likely to have had some modesty and naivety and a consequent shraddhA because at that zero stage one is rather scared about the strict requirements of discrimination, dispassion and sense-control and one wonders whether all these are achievable. At that time it was easy to believe that perhaps in the spiritual field there might be many things which cannot be understood or argued out by the rational mind and one must trust the words of the scriptures and the wise. But now after one has made some progress on the spiritual sAdhanA path, one is likely to think that the mind is now clear and hereafter it will understand all that has yet to be achieved on the path of Self

Realisation. This is a kind of ego – an unrecognizable ego that creeps in. Things do happen even upto the stage of Self-Realisation, that cannot be understood by the smartest intellect . Even a *jnAni* who has achieved that Self-Realisation will not be able to explain them by his intellect. One has to continue with the same regimen without questioning them until the Self-Realisation sprouts up like the rise of the Sun. When those things happen, one has to take them as they are, without analysing them by the intellect. One may have to be content with the thought: "The SadhanA that has brought me so far will certainly take me further by the same Grace of the Lord that brought me up to now; I shall not subject it to any intellectual questioning." Even after one has obtained Enlightenment, the things may still be inaccessible to the intellect. Even our Acharya – there cannot be a better Acharya than he – does not try to tell that secret of achievement to us in the language of the intellect. "I cannot describe it. Simply keep on proceeding with Faith" – this is his message and accordingly he keeps this shraddhA at this advanced stage of sAdhanA.

Had the Acharya told us all the secrets, there would not have been a necessity for Ramanujacharya to establish a VishishhTAdvaita. Somewhere in the philosophy of advaita Ramanuja asked an intellectual question and not finding a reply to that, he thought he had a suitable reply to it and that became his vishishhTAdvaita. OK, but did that reveal all the hidden secrets? No. That is why a Madhwacharya had to establish his dvaita. But even then intellectual questions remain unanswered. That is why still there are many advaitins and many vishishhTAdvaitins. And we are arguing and arguing. Though these arguments are going on at the intellectual level, those who came thereafter, without worrying about testing everything on the touchstone of the intellect, simply follow their own Acharyas with *shraddhA* on the plea "I am born in this particular Smarta or Vaishnava tradition; let me follow with faith what my Acharyas in my tradition have taught us" – and they have reached great spiritual heights accordingly.

A smarta (belonging to the advaita tradition) may say that nothing would equal the experience of identity of Jiva and *Brahman*, whatever these followers of other traditions may claim about their spiritual achievements. Let him say so. But they are certainly greater than many of these smartas who don't practise any sAdhanA with *shraddhA*. Maybe they have not reached the peak experience of realisation of nirguna *Brahman*, of which the smartas speak. But isn't it the same *Brahman* that appears as the *ISvara* or saguna *Brahman*? Those achievers of the other-tradition-followers do somehow establish a rapport with that *ISvara*. And they do obtain a certain godly nature, blessing of Divine Grace and a heart of compassion. Even on the spiritual side, rather than simply bragging about belonging to the glorious advaita tradition without knowing anything worthwhile about the *Atman*, except one's body and the goings-on of the mind, those experiencers of other traditions who are convinced that their soul has been born only to worship and propitiate the Divine are certainly greater. One who thinks that his pure mind which is full to the brim with that kind of *bhakti* is the *Atman* is superior to some one who has had no experience of anything connected with the Realisation of the *Atman*. Once the mind becomes that pure, automatically in course of time there is the chance of that very mind eradicating itself leading to Self-Realisation. But let that be in the future. Right now, those followers of other traditions have, as I said, because of their *shraddhA*,

obtained a divine contact and a divine grace and benefics. That is the very reason there are great souls in all our traditions, known the world over.

It is the play of Mother Goddess – Bikshaa of Illumination – that, at a certain stage, one rises on the strength of his *shraddhA* alone, without any effort on the part of the intellect. That is when *shraddhA* becomes most significant. Even those who have taken several steps on the *sAdhanA* path should simply continue in the path of *shraddhA* and ask no questions; questions will not get any answers palatable to the intellect, nor will it be able to elicit any answers from the *Guru* understandable by the intellect. It is for this reason that *shraddhA* has been placed as one of the parts of the *sAdhanA* regimen.

This kind of *shraddhA*, that is the opposite of "I shall find it myself; I will be able to intellectually understand it", has to be there not only in the beginning but till the end. "The shastras say so; our *guru* says so. Let me go on doing what they say – whatever may happen in between. It will automatically take me to the Goal" – this attitude is *shraddhA*. It is not just one of the components of *sAdhanA* ; it is the peak component. The Acharya says in his introduction to the second chapter BrihadAranyaka Bhashya *shraddhA ca brahma-vijnAne paramaM sAdhanaM*. The Lord also emphatically says (B.G.IV-39) *shraddhAvan labhate jnAnaM* ((only) he who has *shraddhA* gets the enlightening wisdom).

A special status is attached always to the *mantra*s of the Upanishads called *mahA-vAkyas* that declare the identity of *JIva* and *Brahman*. Even among those mahAvAkyas, one of them gets a further unique status, because it is the one which is directly imparted to a shishhhya (disciple). It is the one in Samaveda, where it is given to a celibate youngster who is not a renunciate. The Absolute ParamAtmA who is denoted by 'That' is what You, the *JIvAtmA*, are – This is the message there. The father Uddalaka Aruni is the one who doles out the teaching; and the receiver of the teaching is the son, Svetaketu. The father keeps on reeling *mantra* after *mantra* and ends up with the emphatic refrain: "That is what You are". As he goes along, right in the middle, he says, "Go and bring a banyan fruit, my child".

"Here it is", says the son and produces the fruit.
"Break it" says the father.

[Note by R. Ganapathi, the author of the Tamil rendering: 'Here the Swamigal gives the conversation in a dramatic fashion feigning two voices, one of the *guru* and one of the disciple.]

"Done, my Lord"
"What do you see within the broken fruit?"
"Seeds, and seeds, like small small particles"
"Well, my child, break that seed also"
"Done"
"What do you see inside, now?"
"Nothing, my Lord"
"The nothing that you are referring to has an invisible subtle thing in it. It is from that

subtlety the entire banyan tree springs out" says the sage Aruni, and it is at that point, he addresses the child with affectionate warmth : "Saumya (Smart one), Believe me. Have faith in what I say. *shraddhasva*" '*shraddhasva*' means 'Have *shraddhA*'.

This is the *mahAvAkya* that is at the lofty peak of Vedanta that is taught as the great first step to SanyAsis at the time of their taking *sannyAsa*. And when this upadesha is being given first to that supremely qualified celibate youngster, the Rishi finds it necessary to say '*shraddhasva*'. This just means that one has to have *shraddhA* as his only armour even at the last moment when the stark reality of Realisation of *Brahman* takes place.

Not only in the trust that we place on the concepts and the like. The trust has to be also that, 'by that *Guru* who gives them to us one would also see the final gate open for us'. This is very important. Even though he might be a *jnAni*, he has to play his role of a human, just as God plays the part of an Avatara. Even that would be only a way of showing the right path to some one. But when he involves himself in some of these human activities, the disciple may land himself into a doubt about whether his *guru* is indeed a *jnAni*. Once he starts doubting why the *guru* is acting like an ordinary human, and whether such a personality can ever deliver the spiritual release that he is seeking, there begins the disciple's downfall. That very doubt assumes gigantic proportions and like a ghost occupying his brain, does not allow him to continue his *sAdhanA*. The constant thought that one has been cheated devours him as well as the dreams about his goal. *samshayAtmA vinashyati* (B.G. IV – 40) says the Lord -- 'He who doubts, goes to ruin'. And when He says this he adds the words *ashraddha-dAnascha*, meaning 'one who has no shraddhA'. In IX – 3, He says

ashraddha-danAH purushhaaH nivartante mRtyu-samsAra-vartmani --men without faith (are ruined and) come back to this transmigratory cycle again and again.

In fact he frightens us with a warning, at the same time very compassionately. It is not just a false warning; it will surely happen that way. We should not allow it to happen. We have to develop an unshakeable faith in the thought 'I have come to this *Guru*. Let him appear to others in whatever way they think. As far as I am concerned, God will not let me down; He will certainly grace me, through this *Guru*, with the Release that I seek'. The conviction and faith that we usually develop in our Vidya-*Guru* (the teacher who instructs us with the basics of education) in our early days, -- that same conviction and faith has to be there in the dikshA-*guru* (the *Guru* who finally grants us the sannyAsa status). It is important to cultivate this shraddhA-cum-*bhakti*-cum-sharaNAgati.

Of course it is true that one should resort to a *guru* only after thorough enquiries about him. But suppose you land yourself with a fake *guru*. Even then, if without losing faith in him, if you surrender to him, the All-knowing Lord will bless you with Enlightenment through that *Guru*, though he may not himself be a *jnAni*!

"Conviction comes only by actual perception by ourselves as truth; instead of this if one goes on faith by the shAstras and the Acharyas who repeat those shAstraic statements, that cannot give a firm conviction" – such thinking is nothing but absence of *shraddhA*. On the other hand *shraddhA* is the faith that says: "By the very fact that something is not

comprehensible to my little intellect it must be higher than what can be revealed by my own inquiry; it must be the truth revealed to the Rishis and passed on to us by the Shastras".

One of the six accessories to Vedic knowledge is called *niruktaM*. It was done by Yaska. It delves into the word-meanings of words found in the Vedas. When dwelling upon the meaning of the word '*shraddhA*' he says it originated from the two root words 'shrat' (indicative of Truth) and 'dhA' (which means 'fixing'). So the integrated meaning of the word '*shraddhA*' is to 'fix something in the mind as the truth' – in other words, to believe in something with conviction.

In *Ch.U.* (VII-19-1) there is a *mantra* which means: "This is the kind of *shraddhA* that we should have in that fundamental invisible subject, that should always occupy our mind; only then can we think right" -- *When there is *shraddhA* then and there is right thinking*.

Brahma-vidyA (Knowledge pertaining to the subject of *Brahman*) should be taught only to those who have *shraddhA* – says Mundaka Upanishad. Who are those so qualified? The Upanishad gives a list of such qualifications. (III -2-10). Those who discharge their obligations (*karma*s) in the right manner; *shrotriyas* (those who have excellent scholarship of the vedas); those who have an intense anguish to be in *Brahman*; and those who have *shraddhA*.

In Prashnopanishad also (I – 10) it says those who seek the *Atman* become eligible to do so by their tapas (austerities), celibacy (brahmacharya), *shraddhA*, and learning.

In the *Gita*, Bhagawan explains in one whole chapter the details of divine qualities as against the 'asura' (undivine) qualities and when he finishes this chapter, says: "He who transgresses the rules and regulations of the Shastras will get neither success nor happiness; therefore, O Arjuna, keep the Shastras as your pramANa (basic law) and decide on what to do and what not to do". Having said this, right in the beginning of the next chapter he says there could be an inborn shraddha, totally unrelated to Shastraic issues, and this could be in three different kinds, namely, rajas and tamas which are not desirable, but also a desirable sAtvic *shraddhA*. All this only shows the importance that one has to attach to the concept of *shraddhA*.

The Acharya keeps emphasizing, in all his works, the *shraddhA* in Shastras and the words of the *Guru*.

He has added '*shraddhA*' as one of the 'shamAdi-shhaTka-sampat' (the treasure-sextad beginning with shama), along with shama, dama, uparati, titikshhaa, samAdhAna. But he has not added it as a sixth, following the five mentioned. The first four are mentioned in that order in Brihad-Aranyakopanishad; he keeps that order and now adds shraddhA as the fifth. So shraddA comes after titikshhA but before samAdhAna.

The word 'samAdhAna' has several meanings. One of them is the establishment of truth after meeting doubts. Usually the proponent of one school makes a claim and the opponent from the other school raises objections to the claim. These objections and the arguments laid in support of the objections are collectively called 'pUrva-pakshhaM'. Now the original proponent meets all these objections, and establishes his proposition. This process of meeting objections is called 'samAdhAnaM'. And the established proposition is 'siddhAntaM'. When one listens to the arguments of the purva-pakshha side, even the disciples of the proponent himself, may begin to doubt the truth of the proposition of their own master. In other words their faith in their own master's proposition would waver. This loss of faith, which is the opposite of shraddhA, is what is 'pacified' by the 'samAdhAna' of their own *guru*.

When the Acharya includes '*shraddhA*' as one of the components of sAdhanA, the implication is there is what is called 'a*shraddhA*' (the opposite of *shraddhA*, namely, lack of faith). To conquer that lack of faith is '*shraddhA*'. Having conquered that, one reaches the 'samAdhAna' stage. Just like Peace after War. When faith has to duel with lack of faith, more faith (*shraddhA*) is needed. Afterwards, when there is no more duel, it is the 'samAdhAna' stage.

All this means that 'samAdhAna' has to be preceded by '*shraddhA*'.

That is why when the Acharya decided to to keep '*shraddhA*' – the basic prerequisite for any spiritual venture – also as a component of sAdhanA at the higher stage of entering sannyAsa, he decided to keep it before 'samadhAna'. Because 'samAdhAna' is the stage when the mind is settled enough to receive the sannyAsa rigour. So naturally it comes after the first four, namely, shama, dama, uparati and titikshhaa.

The sAdhanA components though sequenced thus do not turn out to be that sequential. I already told you how they have all to be practised simultaneously. By continued practice of the sAdhanA, one rises on the spiritual ladder but one also slips. Very often it happens that the fall through a slip is more than the rise. You rise by two steps, but you also fall by four steps! So further practice of sAdhanA makes you rise by two steps but you now fall only by three or two steps! Practise further. Practise, practise, practise. This persistent and consistent practice gives even more than the expected success, if it is coupled with the intensity of the sAdhanA, the strength of the will to do it, and the power of the Lord's Grace. One may even jump like a frog from a lower step of the spiritual ladder to a step several steps higher!. And for all this it is the shraddhA that gets things done. And that is why shraddhA is kept before 'samAdhAna'.

The Acharya himself has given a deep meaning for 'samAdhAna'. But we shall come to it later. Before that we shall see how he has defined '*shraddhA*'. And still before that, just as we saw how it comes before 'samAdhAna' we shall also see how it comes after 'titikshhaa'.

We were going to see why *shraddhA* has been kept after titikshhaa.

The discretionary enquiry about the transcendental and the ephemeral (nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka) results in a certain conviction about what is impermanent; but the conviction is not so strong about the permanent. Isn't the permanent one the *Atman*? Unless one has an experience how can conviction about it be strong? But the experience of the *Atman* is to be had right at the very end. By all the enquiry, by all the listening to the teachings of one's Masters, by all that reading of the various works of the Acharya, and by all that exposure to the Upanishads and other philosophical works, one intellectually arrives at the conclusion that there is certainly a thing called *Atman* and it must be of the nature of the fullness of sat-cit-AnandaM. But the conviction in this conclusion will not be as strong as the conviction that arises about the impermanence of the universe of objects, because the latter is experiential. The clarity with respect to the *Atman* cannot be expected to be that perfect. In other words, we are more knowledgeable about what is to be discarded rather than about what is to be merged in. Thus a disgust-cum-dispassion starts with what is to be discarded. Following that, instead of running after the impermanent non-Self, one, through that very dispassion, engages oneself in the control of the senses and the mind – shama and dama. In due time the craving for the ephemeral objects of the universe disappears and the mind becomes empty. This is uparati. But even here there is no experience of the *Atman*. The misery of experience of the non-self is not there, but still the bliss of the fullness of experience of the *Atman* is also not there. Then comes the stage of titikshhaa – the unaffectedness by the happiness and misery of the outside world. Even here the progress is only on the side of the discarding of the non-self, and not on the side of the experience to be.

Another point has to be noted here. A shadow, a trace, of the bliss of the *Atman* will however be there right from the beginning, just as one feels a cool breeze slightly sneaking through a hot summer day, because of a distant rain somewhere. That trace of bliss is the grace of the Almighty. And that grace increases to light showers – but not a downpour. Hot sun, and off and on some cool air, now and then some showers. This is how it goes, because the bliss of the *Atman* comes only after numerous lives. We forget the fact that through all that journey through several lives we have been immersed in the non-self. We think we have not been compensated well enough after all the SadhanA we have done in this life. We feel a sense of disappointment and there is an intense anguish. By the steps of our sAdhanA we think we have achieved quite a bit of tolerance and endurance (titikshhaa), but this anguish for the blissful experience of the *Atman* comes from nowhere, as it were. It actually comes because the Lord Himself is testing you. This is the time when you need *shraddhA* so that you don't leave off your sAdhanA. That is the reason for *shraddhA*, the higher level *shraddhA*, being kept after titikshhaa.

The definition that the Acharya gives to *shraddhA* is:

shAstrasya guru-vAkyasya satya-buddhyA-vadhAraNA /sA shraddhA kathitA
sadbhiH yayA vastU-palabhyate // (Verse 25/26 of Vivekachudamani)

"The noble ones say: ShraddhA is the conviction arising through the intellect that shAstras and the words of the *guru* are indeed true; by this shraddhA is the Reality attained".

Ordinarily we take faith or shraddhA to be that which discards the function of intellect (and takes things on faith). Here it says the ShAstras and words of the *guru* are taken to be true by an analysis of the intellect -- *buddhyavadhAraNA*. There is no contradiction. Because, analysis or confirmation by the intellect does not mean one takes shAstras and words of the *guru* as true only if the intellect confirms them after an analysis. Then what does it mean? It is the intellect that has to decide after an analysis: "I cannot expect to know everything. It is not possible to offer a judgement all by ourselves. Regarding matters connected with after-life and with the Self, things incomprehensible to us, but intuited by the jnAna-dRRishhTi (intuited wisdom) given by the Lord Himself and by one's own experience by the authors of the ShAstras and the *Guru* who knows the ShAstras; what they say have to be accepted by us without further inquiry". To arrive at this conclusion by use of one's intellect is what is called "buddhy-avadhAraNaM". It is not that the intellect is used to decide on the Truths; the intellect decides that there is no place for intellect here!

Mark! This is not what a stupid who has no power of the intellect accepts anything without question. Such a one will get cheated. When we said 'nitya-anitya-vastu-vivekaM', we did mean the process of discriminating between the good and the bad and that would certainly imply the use of the intellect. In order to discriminate, one has to develop and train one's intellect to become sharp. On the other hand when the Shastras and the *Guru* are saying something which is not comprehensible by that intellect, he has to accept that without allowing the intellect to intervene. It is more difficult not to allow the intellect to intervene, rather than allow it to do its function. This is possible only if there is modesty to the extreme. One has to develop that kind of modesty. Instead of having a stupid man's faith, one has to cultivate an intelligent faith in the words of the *Guru* and of the Shastras, without countering them by objections – this is the *shraddhA* that is being talked about.

avadhArana has two meanings. One is 'a deep conviction'. The other is 'a limitation'. Both the meanings have to be integrated here. The intellect limits itself by concluding that this is 'beyond my own jusrisdiction' and therefore is determined to consider Shastras and *Guru*-words as true. By *shraddhA* one can reach the Truth is what is implied by *yayA vastu upalabhyate*. 'She' (*sA*) is called *shraddhA* – the word is feminine – by which the Absolute Reality (*vastu*) is obtained (*upalabhyate*).

In the Tamil region we use "vAstavaM" and "nijaM" for something true. The word "nijaM" does not mean that "nijaM" means 'what is in its own nature', or 'what belongs'. Probably our usage that gives the meaning 'true' to it must have arisen thus. When we dress up for a particular role in a drama we play the role, don't we? That is only a role, a pose, a disguise. When we are off the disguise, we become what we are usually. So a disguise or a role presents only a falsity, whereas when we take off the role we become our true personality, whatever we are. Since a disguise means falsity or untruth, its opposite, namely, the role to which we naturally belong, -- that is our 'nijam' – is taken to denote truth. This is how 'nijam' must have come to stand for 'truth'! But let that be.

But the meaning of 'vAstavaM' as something that is true, is a correct one. The word has been derived from 'vastu'. The nature of 'vastu' is 'vAstavaM'. 'vastu' means a 'thing' ordinarily; but its most important connotation is 'that which truly exists'. Things and objects are not in our imagination; they actually exist and that is why a thing is called 'vastu'. Thus 'vastu' means something that truly exists and so we also use 'vAstavaM' the property of 'vastu' for 'truth'.

In the defining *shloka* for '*shraddhA*' that we were discussing, it says, 'by means of *shraddhA* is the reality obtained' *yayA vastu upalabhyate*. Ordinarily though we call everything that exists in the operational world as 'vastu', when enlightenment comes upon us all these will be known as existing only in our imagination, because it is the absolute *Brahman* only that really exists in the absolute sense. That is the 'vastu' ultimate. And that 'vastu' is obtained only by *shraddhA*.

In this definition of *shraddhA*, it is the intellect that realises its limitation and gets the conviction that shastras and the words of the *guru* are true and this conviction is *shraddhA*, says the Acharya. But in his '*aparokshhAnubhUti*' he does not even rely on this role of intellect to voluntarily limit itself. There he does not give any such leeway to the intellect and accordingly he gives the simple definition in the commonly understood way:

*nigamA-chArya-vAkyeshhu bhaktiH shraddheti vishrutA *

meaning, ShraddhA is the exhibition of *bhakti* (faith and dedication) towards the words of the *Guru* and of the ShAstras.

It is very customary to link the two words *bhakti* and shraddhA. '*bhakti*' denotes the aspect of love and liking and 'shraddhA' denotes the aspect of faith. But if we think about that, faith or trust comes only if there is a liking and the liking comes only if there is a trustworthiness. The two are inseparable. In the words of the *guru* and the ShAstras, we should have this faith coupled with liking and this love coupled with trust. That is *shraddhA*. Love is what involves our heart in the thing. Such involvement of a heart-felt trust in the *guru* and the shAstras is *shraddhA*.

9. SadAShiva Brahmendra

The One mystic saint who falls into a category all by himself is **SadASiva-brahmendra** (commonly spelt as Sadasiva brahmendra). Regarding his time there is not enough evidence. It has to be some period of time between the middle of the sixteenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century. The reasons are as follows. The 57th pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, namely Sri Paramasivendra Saraswathi (1538 –1586) had a pupil by name Ramanatha who later had a pupil by name Nallai Adhvari. This Adhvari acknowledges Sadasiva-brahmendra as his *guru*. A junior contemporary of Sri Paramasivendra saraswathi was Nilakanta-Dikshidar, grandson of the brother of the famous Advaita scholar-devotee Appayya Dikshidar. This Nilakanta, the grandson of Appayya Dikshidar, was the chief minister of King Tirumalai-Nayak of Madurai.

Nilakantha had a pupil Ramabhadra who had a pupil by name Venkatesa Dikshidar who later came to be known by the name Ayyaval of Tiruvisanallur. This Ayyaval and Sadasiva Brahmendra had been schoolmates. This much is known. On the other side we know that Sadasiva Brahmendra met the Tamil scholar-poet-devotee-philosopher Tayumanavar (1705 – 1742?) in 1738 C.E. Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman (Rajah of Pudukkottai) (1730-1769) subscribes to this meeting.

A respected scholar in both Sanskrit and Tamil, Tayumanavar was a minister to a king in Trichinopoly. When he became god-minded he went over to Rameswaram and then from place to place preaching Shaiva-siddhanta philosophy and Shiva worship. His songs are full of the divine bliss which he enjoyed in abundance. The songs, on the theme of the *Atman* craving for the union with the *ParamAtman*, are famous for their simplicity. He is also known for his unceasing emphasis on the unity of all paths to God and of all religions, and, in particular, on the unity of Vedanta and Shaiva-siddhanta.

These are the major factors for scholars coming to the almost unbelievable conclusion that Sadasiva perhaps lived for nearly 200 years. But if we know what kind of mystic and knower of *Brahman* he was, we tend to feel that the improbable could have been possible. The Upanishadic maxim: ***brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*** (meaning, the knower of *Brahman* is *Brahman*), really applies to Sadasiva Brahmendra. It is only in mythology we come across such a *brahma-vit* - examples are: boy-sage *Suka*, and Sage *jaDa-bharata* - but in our own historical world, such examples are rarest of the rare. Sadasiva Brahmendra is one such.

Growing up in a village on the banks of the Cauvery in Tamilnadu, Sadasiva was a most gifted student, much given to arguing and debating. After an early marriage and a spark of revelation on the day of his wife's reaching puberty he renounced the world and performed a strenuous *sAdhanA* for eighteen years. One day he was taunted by his *guru* for his talkativeness. On that day he took a vow of silence and he kept it up for the rest of his life which he spent as a wandering naked (*avadhUta*) *sannyasi*. The songs he composed during the period of his discipleship are still very popular. In his wanderings, of which we have no complete record, he is said to have performed many miracles which were just an overflowing of the compassion he had for all humanity. He was one of the greatest of *siddhas*. His mind was always immersed in the Absolute *Brahman*. His name is part of the folk-lore in all of South India. His major work *is brahma-sUtra-vRtti*, which is a scholarly but lucid commentary on the *brahma-sUtras*. He has thirteen other works to his credit - such as, *yoga-sUtra-vRtti*, also called *yoga-sudhAkaram*; *jagad-guru-ratna-mAlotsava*, a history of Kanchi Kamakoti mutt in 87 verses; *advaita rasa-manjari* in 45 verses; and others. His *Atma-vidyA-vilAsam* is a composition in 62 verses together forming a spiritual autobiography. The verses describe how a knower of *Brahman* would behave and as far as the folklore and all the stories about Sadasiva-brahmendra go, the description fits him most suitably. **He may be rightly called the Saintly Perfection of the Impersonal absolute**.

> Fully engrossed in the enjoyment of his own bliss, he remains in another world as it were; and as strikes his fancy, here he is engaged in thought, there he is singing and there he is dancing. Verse No.21
>
> The sage shines supreme, silent and placid, with the ground under the tree as his resting place and with his palm as the begging bowl, wearing no clothes but only the jewel of non-attachment Verse No.35
>
> Having dissolved the entire world (by right knowledge) and being under the power of the all-embracing substratum that survives such dissolution, he puts into his mouth by force of *prArabdha-karma*, the handful of food which comes to him Verse No.40
>
> The yogi sees nothing, speaks nothing and hears nothing that is spoken. He remains steadfast in the incomparable region of bliss, immovable like a log of wood. Verse No.44
>
> The great renouncer who knows the Truth of all the vedas wanders like an ignorant fool un-noticed, devoid of all sense of difference and seeing only Perfection everywhere and in all creatures. Verse No. 45
>
> Embracing the Lady Equanimity and having been overpowered by Bliss he sleeps with his head for a pillow, with nothing for cover and with the bare ground for a bedding. Verse No.46
>
> The sage rejects nothing considering it bad; nor does he accept anything, considering it good. Knowing that everything is the result of Ignorance, he remains unattached. Verse No.50
>
> He does not think at all of what is past, nor does he care in his mind about the future. He does not even care who is in front of him, for He is the One Perfect Bliss in everything. Verse No.51
>
> The king of renouncers rests alone, rooted in Self and enjoying the Inner Bliss; he rejects nothing that comes to him and never desires what does not come to him. Verse No.53
>
> The great ascetic transcends the rules of caste and status shaking off from him the injunctions and prohibitions of the scriptures and he remains merely the perfect Knowledge-Bliss. Verse No.57

This was exactly how he himself lived. So it is very difficult to get any historical help from stories about him. He was such a mystic that any story could have fitted him. To sift fact from fancy is utterly impossible. However a few miracle-stories that have been catalogued by no less a person than the famous ShankarAchArya of Sringeri himself may be cited, because we may trust the yogic capabilities of the Swami who must have had his own reasons to list them in the only written biography, composed by him, that we have of Sadasiva Brahmendra. Believe them or not, here are the stories.

On the river banks of the Cauvery in Mahadanapuram in Tiruchy District he was seen by a few kids. They requested him to take them to the religious fairs in Madurai, that time

being the solar month of Leo when the Madurai temple has usually an annual festival. The sage perhaps felt an overflow of compassion for them. He asked them to close their eyes and in no time they were in Madurai (more than 100 miles away); they had their darsan of the Lord and the Goddess there, they feasted at the festivities and in due time before it was night they were back in Mahadanapuram on the same banks of the Cauvery. The parents of the children would not believe the stories but their graphic description of the Madurai festivities right to the last detail baffled them. They ran to the Cauvery banks to look for the sage but he was not there.

On the river bed of Kodumudi river Sadasiva Brahmendra was sitting in trance on the sands. Suddenly water flowed down the river in a flood and the river was flooded for the next few months. Spectators saw water submerge him as he was still sitting in his trance. He was given up as drowned. But three months later when the floods subsided he was still there in the same trance posture; he just rose up and walked away.

It was harvest season. He was seen 'carelessly' crossing the haystacks which have been piled up on the paddyfield. The warnings given to him to avoid the haystacks went unheeded. One of the men around raised his hatchet to hit him. But lo! the raised hand stayed right there. The sage was walking along as if nothing had happened. The rest of the spectators ran to him and pleaded that he save the man who had raised his hand to hit him. The sage looked back and the hand came down. The sage walked away.

Long after all these happened when almost people had forgotten the memories of his wandering in their lands, once the naked sannyasi was seen walking right through a muslim harem of a Nawab. As a brahma-jnani who sees nothing but *Brahman* everywhere, he would not distinguish between the different human figures which cross his path nor would he be distracted by the sights or noises that his environment may present to him. It was in this state of trance that he was walking along. He, the naked sannyasi, walked straight into the harem, entering it at one end and walking out at the other all the while walking through a maze of inmates of the Nawab's harem. The news reached the nawab, he had his men chase him, they cut off both his hands as he was walking along, the hands fell off and … still he was walking along silently as if nothing had happened. The nawab got scared, picked up the hands that had been severed, ran to the Sage and offered them in total remorse. The sage stopped his walking, the severed hands were restored to their place, the hands became normal and the sage walked away! There was no conversation.

It was Venkatesa AyyavaL, his classmate of old times, that broke his silence, maybe once or twice. During his discipleship days Sadasiva used to sing *bhajans* in a sweet voice. AyyavaL reminded him of those good old days and implored him to sing again for the benefit of the people who would certainly enjoy listening to his songs. Then came some wonderful songs, all of them having the theme of 'The Experience of the Bliss of remaining in the Absolute *Brahman*' – *BrahmA-nubhavaM, brahma-saMsparzaM, brAhmI-sthiti* as it is variously called in the *Gita* and elsewhere. Sadasiva-brahmendra's songs are so delightfully full of this blissful divine experience that they are even now constantly rendered by musicians in concerts and public gatherings for a spiritual

purpose; and when they are so rendered, no one will miss the elevating moods that they generate - even in those who do not understand the language, Sanskrit, in which it has been composed by the saint. His songs :

mAnasa samcara re , brahmaNi mAnasac samcara re …
(Hey mind, dwell on *Brahman* …)
sarvam brahma-mayam, re re sarvam brahma-mayam …
(Everything is *Brahman* to the brim …)
khelati mama hRdaye RamaH … (Rama is sporting in my mind)
piba re Rama-rasam … (Drink the nectar of Rama, hey ….)
brUhi mukundeti … (Recite mukunda, speak of Him …)
cintA nAsti kila … (they have no worries, ….)

are all very famous and each one of them is a capsule of the bliss of *Brahman* that Sadasiva had enough to spare for others.

Appayya Dikshidar wrote *siddhAnta-leSa-sangraha*, which is the first reading for all students of advaita from his time. It contains all the different dialectic thinking under one presentation in prose. But it is however a very elaborate book. Sadasiva Brahmendra epitomised this book in verse form in 212 verses and called it *siddhAnta-kalpa-valli*. This again became a little too much for readers. In the 20th century, Vasudeva brahmendra (who attained *siddhi* in 1931 C.E. and who was also a direct disciplic descendent of the famous Upanishad-brahma-yogin of the 18th century who wrote the commentaries for all the 108 upanishads) wrote a concise summary of the whole thing in prose, entitled *Sastra-siddhanta-leSa-tAtparya-sangrahaH*. Incidentally it is this Vasudeva-Brahmendra who was the *guru* of R. Visvanatha Sastri (1882-1956), the father and *guru* of this author. Humble prostrations to the *Guru-paramparA*.

Om shAntiH shAntiH shAntiH.

Glossary of the Puranic figures mentioned

Agastya: One of the greatest sages of yore. The anecdotes that reveal his spiritual and psychic powers are in every Purana. Also con sidered to be the father of the Tamil language in the sense that the language and its grammar were divinely revealed to him.

Agni: Fire; God of fire; one of the eight deities guarding the eight directions.

Ahalya: Sage Gautama's loyal wife, who was, for once, disloyal. Was it a willing act of sin or was it a tragedy of circumstances? – is a perennial controversy. But Ahalya is listed as one among the five great chaste womaen of Hindu mythology.

Ajamila: A Brahmin who was ostracized by his caste because he married an outcaste and was so infatuated with her that he committed several misdeeds. However, when dying, he called to his side his son, Narayana, by name and was therefore redeemed by the Lord for taking His name!

Akrura: Krishna's paternal uncle and a great admirer-devotee of Lord Krishna

Ambarisha: the great king in the ikshvAku dynasty, famous for his superlative devotion; His devotion withstood the wrath of even the fiercest sage, Durvasa.

Arjuna: the great hero of the *mahAbhArata*, the middle one of the five Pandava princes; friend and disciple of Lord Krishna. Krishna became his charioteer in the great war and their friendly discourse at the start of the battle constitutes the *bhagavad-gItA*

Balarama: son of Rohini. Elder brother of Lord Krishna.

Bhishma: the grandfather figure in the *mahA-bhArata*; respected and revered by everyone, friend and foe. An intense devotee, through intellectual conviction, of Lord Krishna. After the *mahAbhArata* War, it was to him that Yudhishtira, King of Hastinapur, at the instance of Lord Krishna, asked several questions on Hindu dharma and to him is due the elaborate expositions on the various subtleties and niceties of dharma that occupy a sizable portion of the great epic.

Dakshina-murti: The manifestation of Siva as a youthful preceptor, trampling upon the demon of ignorance, facing the southern direction to ward off Spiritual Death from His devotees and confer on them Immortality. The hymn composed by Sankara on Dakshina-murti, known as dakshina-murti ashTakam is very famous.

Dasaratha: father of Lord Sri Rama. A king of the Ikshvaku dynasty, also known as the solar line of kings.

Dhruva: the boy-devotee who decided to seek redress, from the Lord Himself, for the insulting treatment he got from his stepmother. When he did see the Lord after a historiuc penance for five and a half months, he had already become the lodestar in the firmament of Bhakti.

Draupadi: Panchali princess, wife of the fiv e Pandavas,heroine of the Mahabharata and an admirer-devotee of Lord Krishna who performed miracle after miracle in her favour.

Gajendra: the elephant king of yore who appealed to the Fountain of Godhead (and none less!) at his greatest crisis and got divine rescue.

Ganga: The Ganges; the deity associated with the river Ganges.

Garuda: the King of birds; born of kaSyapa and vinatA; the bitter enemy of serpents; the eternal carrier or vAhana of Lord VishNu and as such his most intimate devotee.

Gopis: the milkmaids of Brindavan; companions and staunch self-effacing devotees of Lord Krishna; the role-models of bhakti par excellence.

Hanuman: the well-known devotee of Lord Rama; the hero, next only to Rama himself, of the Ramayana; has the form of a monkey. Orthodox opinion will classify him as the foremost devotee of the Lord and to be worshipped as such as a God in his own right and as an *ishTa-devatA* (= favourite deity); the one deity worshipped and revered throughout the Hindu world without exception of caste or region or school of philosophy to which one adheres.

Hiranyakashipu: father of Prahlada; the Asura King for whose destruction the Lord had to take the Narasimha avatara.

Ikshvaku: The first King who ruled on earth in the present Manvantara, known as Vaivasvta Manvantara. His dynasty of kings includes such great names as Bhagiratha, Dilipa and Rama.

JaDabharata: the perfect sage who, for fear of getting into the clutches of attachment, would not even talk, would not protest or resist whatever anybody did or spoke to him. For he story of how this happened see the chapter 'Gems from Shrimad Bhagavatam'.

Janaka: Sita's father, in the Ramayana. The Upanishads speak, however, of a philosopher-king of the same name.

JaTAyu: the vulture-friend of Rama (and of King Dasaratha) in the Ramayana; by offering his very life in the cause of Rama, in a fight with Ravana, he attained moksha by dying on the lap of Lord Rama.

Kamsa: maternal uncle of Lord Krishna;he was killed by the latter in a duel for his tyranny. But as he was constantly thinking of the Lord even in his dreams, he was blessed with moksha.

King Bali: also known as mahAbali, grandson of the great devotee, Prahlada. By his spiritual prowess he became king of the three worlds. Later the Lord had to appear as a dwarf (vAmana-avatAra) and trick him into submission by his own promise

Lakshmana: brother of Lord Rama in the Ramayana; the descent (= avatAra) on earth of Adi-Sesha, the serpent-seat of Lord Vishnu in the world of Vaikuntha.

Lakshmi: the eternal consort of Lord Vishnu; the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity.

Narada: the great divine devotee of the Lord, who perambulates all the three worlds with the Lord's name in his heart and on his lips, with a *vINA* in his hand, bringing comfort to all, through his famous but mysterious machinations, which always end in the success of virtue over vice; the apostle of *nAma-sankIrtana* (= recitation and singing of God's names) and the legendary author of the authoritative *bhakti-sUtras*.He is not only the divine messenger in the purANas, but the friend, philosopher, guide and consoler of all - gods, humans and asuras alike - the intermediary between God and His creation.He places himself in the hands of God as a willing instrument for the service of man and prefers to enjoy the Divine play and company to becoming merged in Him for ever. To that extent he is gracious enough to retain a little ego to teach the other souls immersed in samsAra.

Panchali: another name for Draupadi, because she is the daughter of the King of Panchala.

Pandavas: The five sons of Pandu; the heroes of the epic Mahabharata, much maligned by the Kauravas, the one hundred sons of Dhritarashtra.

Parasara: Father of Vyasa; author of one of the smRtis (moral codes) known as Parasara-smRti. Later in the 12^{th} century, Sri Ramanuja named one of his disciples Parasara, who wrote the famous commentary on Vishnu-sahasra-nAma, known as the Parasara-bhatta-bhashya.

Parikshit: the Pandava emperor; grandson of Arjuna; son of Abhimanyu; to him was narrated the entire *bhagavata* story by Sage Suka and thus arose Vyasa's *bhAgavata-purANa*

Patanjali: A great seer of rare insight. The first exponent of the yoga system of Indian philosophy and the author of 'yogasUtras', the authoritative tone of which speaks of his genuine personal experience. Is probably different from the celebrated grammarian of the same name who lived in the 2^{nd} century B.C.

Prahlada: the divine son of the undivine Hiranyakashipu whom the Gods and zAsuras dreaded alike. Prahlada's unshakable presence in the omnipresence of the Lord resulted in the Lord appearing from within a pillar, but appearing in such a form (half-man, half-lion) that it proved to be the end of Hiranyakashipu.

Radha: the celebrated gopi (milkmaid) of Brindavan, beloved of Krishna, and the principal character in Jayadeva's Gita-Govinda; in later times came to be worshippedas a goddess and an avatara of Lakshmi. Hindu literature and mythology are studded with stories of the mutual devotion and divine love of Radha with Krishna that we can no more think of one without the other.

Rahugana: A King to whom JaDabharata gives the spiritual teaching in a most unexpected context.

Ranganatha: Name of the deity as worshipped in the famous temple of Srirangam

Ravana: The Brahmin-born Rakshasa king of Lanka, who brought destruction on himself by committing the one sin of carrying off Lord Rama's consort, Sita. Since he met his end on the battlefield at the hands of the Lord Himself, he attained salvation (after one more birth).

Sanat-sujata: One of the four sons of BrahmA the Creator, born out of his sheer mental construct. Like his three other brothers, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanatana, he also refused to lead a worldly life and chose a life of renunciation and illumination.

Sisupala: the arch-enemy of Lord Krishna who finally met his end at the hands of the Lord and reached moksha.

Sugriva: the dethroned king of the monkey kingdom in the Ramayana; befriended by Lord Rama and restored by him to kingship; he placed the might of all his kingdom at Rama's disposal against Ravana

Shuka: the great boy-sage, son of vyAsa, noted as the perfect specimen of one who has renounced both internally and externally; therefore referred to in all scriptural literature as a *brahma-jnAni* (= one who lives always in the full realisation of *brahman*)

Uddhava: cousin, admirer-devotee and confidant of Lord Krishna; the parting message that Krishna gives to him on the eve of His exit from the world is known as *'uddhava-gItA'*, built into 18 chapters of the eleventh *skanda* of the *bhAgavata-purANa.*

Vyasa: The celebrated author and father figure not just in the story of the Maha-bharata, but in the entire cultural milieu of Hinduism. The prolific nature of his writings transcends, in quantum alone, not to speak of its qualitative impact, that of any writer in (probably) any language in the total history of mankind.

Yajna-valkya: Reputed Maharishi and Seer of the Upanishads. The famous teaching of Yajna-valkya to his wife Maitreyi, is found in Brihad-AraNyaka-Upanishad.

Yasoda: cow-herd queen and foster mother of Lord Krishna. She got several instances of the Godhood of the child Krishna but her affection and attachment were so intense that it turned into a motherly love of the divine in the form of the child.

Yudhishtira: The eldest of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata. Not only the true hero of the story, but the role model for all time for all souls wedded to dharma.

INDEX

Abhisheka
  of Nataraja, 89
Acamanam, 36
Adi Shankara, 66
Adiyappiah, 369
advaita, 32, 64, 71, 191, 243, 256
Advaita, 318
ahalyA, 168
Alcor, 125
Almighty
  Has purpose for everything, 99
Amrita-varshini, 370
Andal, 358
animal sacrifices
  in vedic times, 84
anvaya, 66
Appayya Dikshidar, 67
Applied Science, 130
artha, 56
AtmA, 33
Atman, 13, 16, 23, 64, 65, 73, 80, 148, 152, 158, 172, 174, 176, 191, 203, 232, 234, 242, 249, 255, 304, 305, 340, 375, 377, 379
attitudes
  emphasis on,, 83
Aum, iv, 18
Aurobindo, 239
Avatar, 58
avatAra, 239, 240
avidyA, 66
BadarikASrama, 360
bANa-linga, 245
Bangaru Kamakshi, 368
Bhagavatam, 172
Bhaja-Govindam, 339
bhakti, 58, 195, 210, 343, 364
  does God grant it?, 101
Bhakti, 55, 223, 243, 366
Bharata, 134
BhArata-varsha, 198
BhikShu *Gita*, 259
Bhishma, 167
Brahma, 82
BrahmA, 116
Brahma Sutra, 66
brahman, 241
Brahman, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 17, 18, 22, 26, 27, 28, 42, 65, 116, 165, 167, 169, 170, 180, 208, 230, 264
  and will, 100
Brahman', 172
Cosmic Rhythm, 89
Creation, 115
dedication, 75
deer Bharata, 201
DETACHMENT, 80
dhAraNa, 184
Dharma, 56, 121, 160
dhyAna, 184, 334
Dikshidar, 369
Discipline
  versus Suppression, 79
Dissolution, 115
Draupadi, 222, 242
Duty
  attitude, 78
Dvaita, 67
egoism, 184
eighth Sun, 128, 129
Ettayapuram, 370
faith, 61
false 'I', 71
Fate
  and actions, 103
  and Free Will, 103
father's word
  why is it law?, 119
five senses, 357
Ganesa, 245
GangA, 244, 245
Gaudapada, 177
Gaya, 122
GAyatrI, 14, 73, 244
ghana recital, 114
Ghana-pAThi, 114
Ghantaki, 245
Gita, v, 58, 74, 75, 78, 87, 241
GitA, 244
gIta-govinda, 362
God, 239, 240, 241, 242
  existence of, 61
  expresses through miracles, 242
  four reasons for non-existence, 240

purpose of avatAra, 240
what purpose Creation?, 241
why does He allow suffering?, 240
God's Will
good and bad happenings, 102
Goddess Kali, 202
God-men, 241
*gopi*kA-gItaM, 224
gopis, 221, 367
guru, 181
Guru Nanak, 361
hamsa-mantra, 45
HiraNya-garbha, 332
immanence, 206
Immanence, 204
ishTa-devatA, 66
ISvara
words, not actions to be followed, 227
*itihAsa*s, 83
Iyer, 369
JaDa-bharata, 201
Jaya and Vijaya, 187
Jesus, 242
Jiva, 66
JIva, 157
jIvan-mukta, 185
Jivan-mukta, 341
JIvanmukta, 154
JIvAtmA, 34
Jnanesvar, 360, 363
Kailasa, 67
kalpa, 77, 84, 116, 208
kalpa-sUtras, 118
kAma, 56
Kamban, 187
Kanchi Mahaswamigal, 240
Kapila, 202, 253
karma, 56
attitude important, 76
karma yoga, 73, 74, 75, 78
Karma yoga, 75
karma yogi, 77
karma-yoga, 58
KaSyapa, 129
King Bharata, 200
Krishna, 123, 239, 241, 242
kshetra, 157
lakshArcanA, 21
Lakshmi, 127, 128
lalitA-sahasranAma, 367
lalitA-sahasra-nAma, 228
LalitA-sahasranAma, 33, 157
Lord Subrahmanya, 369
M.K. Venkatrama Iyer, 170
Macaulay, 128
Madhurakavi Alvar, 358
Madhwa, 132, 178
Mahabharata, v, 123, 241
mahA-bhArata-tAtparya-nirnaya, 327
mahAvAkya, 376
maha-vakyas, 61
mahA-vAkyas, 176
mahA-yuga, 116
Mandukya-Karika, 68
mantra, 123
mAyA, 166, 206, 229, 362
MAyA, 67, 160
meat-eating, 83
metaphysics, 55
mind, 55, 239
rebellion through rationale, 239, 240
miracle, 239, 241
Miracle-pair par excellence, 241
moksha, 199, 338
Moksha, 56
Mother, 122
Mother Goddess, 369
music
origin from divine Damaru, 89
namaH, 47, 205, 206
Nandanar Charitram, 92
Narada, 27, 172, 187, 191, 224, 246, 363
Narayana Bhattatiri, 243
Nataraja icon, 91
Natha-muni, 320
nirguNa bhakti, 186, 361
one-pointedness, 152
pAdukA-sahasram, 325
pancAyatana-*pUjA*, 245
ParamAtmA, 34
parA-prakRti, 205
ParASara, 34
Parikshit, 228
Perialvar, 358
Prahlada-stuti, 195
prakRti, 83, 103, 156, 235, 241
praLaya, 55
prANAyAma, 184
prArabdha, 97, 104, 333
prArabdha karma, 105, 185
prArabdha-karma, 93
prasthAna-traya, 324
PrasthAna-traya, 58
pratyAhAra, 184
prayer, 242
preconditioning, 64
purANas, 73
*PurANA*s, 83
Pure Science, 130
PURITY, 79

Purusha, 106
purushArtha, 56
R. Visvanatha Sastri, 243
Radha, 222, 223
Rahugana, 202
Rama, 123, 164, 239
Rama-carita-manas, 248
Ramakrishna, 239
Ramana, 240, 338
Ramanuja, 132, 178, 361
Ramayana, v, 123
Ram-charit-manas, 342
real 'I', 71
Realistic advaita, 254
Reason, 61
renuciation, 74
Rg-veda, 213
Rishabhadeva, 198
rituals
  ultimate purpose of, 119
S.L, 258
Sabari, 222
saguNa Brahman, 365
Saguna *Brahman*, 101
SAJATIYA-BHEDA, 179
sAkshi, 71
sAlagRama, 245
samadrishti, 366
samsAra, 56, 74
saMsAra, 332
S*anatsujAtIyaM*, 319
Sanat-sujAtIyaM, 53
Sannyasa-Ashrama, 202
Saraswati, 127, 128
Sastri, 369
Sat-chid-Ananda, 69
sat-cid-Ananda, 171
SaThAri, 325
Sathya Sai Baba, 240
sat-sangh, 212
SELF-CONTROL, 79
seven Suns, 128
Shankara, 34, 95, 132, 152, 244, 356
Shiva
  Strokes on the drum, 89
ShivAnandalahari, 354
ShivAnanda-lahari, 343
Shiva-naTarAja, 164
Shloka, 122
shonabhadra, 245
Solar Energy, 130
soul
  by itself is free, 242
SraddhA, 55
Srirangam, 358
Stephen Hawking, 241
sthita-prajna, 77
Subbaraya Shastri, 369
Suppression
  versus Discipline, 79
sUrya-namaskAra-praSna, 128
suvrata, 164
svaDharma, 76
sva-Dharma, 74
SVAGATA-BHEDA, 180
svarUpa-lakshaNa, 165, 235
Swami RamAnanda, 361
Swami VivekAnanda, 342
taTastha-lakshaNa, 41, 165
Telugu, 368
Tevaaram, 91
the Buddha, 359
The Self, 358
three bondages, 209
Time
  concept in Hindu cosmology, 115
tirukkuRaL, 82
Tirumandiram, 357
Tirumangai-Alvar, 358
tiruvAymozhi, 359
Tondar-adippodi-alvar, 358
transmigration, 74
TRUTH, 80
Tsunami, 99
Tulaja Raja, 368
Tulsi, 248
Uddhava, 360
untouchability, 121
Upanishad, 57, 61, 65, 163, 171, 205, 337, 357
Upanishad Brahma yogin, 370
Upanishads
  A.U., 68, 176, 255
  Br.U., 117, 173, 174, 176
  Ch.U., 46, 169, 172, 176
  GaNapati-Upanishad, 2
  I.U., 155, 340
  Ka.U., 43, 175, 207
  Ke.U., 173
  M.N.U., 342
  Ma.U., 117, 176
  Mu.U., 166
  Mu.U.,, 241
  muktikopanishad, 176
  Sv.U., 33, 207
  T.U., 42, 47, 204
Urdhva-tANDava
  divine dance pose, 90

Vaikuntha, 67
Vaikuṇtha, 187
Valmiki, 27, 123, 364
VarAha-Avatara, 188
VAsanA, 57, 202
vAsanAs, 76
VasanAs, 55, 116
Vedanta, v, 63, 70, 318
Vedas, 18, 19, 68, 116, 343
vegetarianism, 82
  why practices are different?, 83
VIJATIYA-BHEDA, 179
Vijayadasami, 128
Vishishtadvaita, 67
Vishnu sahasra-nAmaM, 155, 319
viSishTAdvaita, 32
Vyasa, 123, 364
yajna, 75
  alchemy of,, 76
Yajnavalkya, 173
yoga, 76

Index of Proper Names of Places, Persons & Gods

Adi Shankara, 211
Adisesha, 88
Ahalya, 84
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 90
Apastambha, 119
Appar, 91
Appayya Dikshidar, 60, 385
Arundhati, 125
Bhartrhari, 133
Brahma, 55
BrahmA, 87
Buddha, 84
Chaitanya, 60
Chit-sabhA, 90
Dakshinamurti, 101
Dasaratha, 81
Dhritarashtra, 81
Dhruva, 84
Draupadi, 87
Gajendra, 84
Gopalakrishna Bharathi, 92
Guruvayoor, 59
indra, 86
Jabali, 81
Jayadeva, 218
Kabirdas, 60
Kaikeyi, 81
Kamban, 136, 189
Kanaka SabhA, 90
Kannappar, 83
King Raja-Raja I, 91
Kuresa, 84
Lakshmi, 88
Madhva, 60
Malik-Kafur, 91
Manikkavachagar, 353
Meerabai, 60
muyalakan, 89
Nambi Aroorar, 351
Nambi-Andar-Nambi, 91
Nandanar, 92
Narada, 85
Nataraja, 89
Nayanmars, 92
NilakanTha, 234
Nritta SabhA, 90
Patanjali, 88
Prahlada, 82
Raghavendra, 60
Ramakrishna, 60, 101
Ramanuja, 60
Ramanujacharya, 84
RAvaNa, 87
Robert Oppenheimer, 148
Sambandar, 91
Sanatkumara, 81
Sathya Sai Baba, 102
Sekkizhar, 90
Shankara, 53, 60, 84
Shukra-acharya, 189
Sisupala, 221
Sundarar, 91
Swami ChinmayAnanda, 104
Tillai, 88
Tirumangai-AlvAr, 86
Tirunavukkarasar, 60
Tiruvarur, 91
Vallalar, 60
Vasishta, 80
Vedanta Desika, 60
Venkatesa AyyavaL, 385
vibhISaNa, 87
Vibhishana, 84
Virupaksha, 91
Vishnu, 85
Visvakarma, 91
Visvamitra, 80
Visvanatha Sastri, 385
VyAgrapAda, 88
Adi Shankara, 213
Adisesha, 90
Ahalya, 86
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 92
Apastambha, 120
Appar, 94
Appayya Dikshidar, 61, 387
Arundhati, 126
Bhartrhari, 134
Brahma, 56
BrahmA, 89
Buddha, 85
Chaitanya, 61
Chit-sabhA, 92
Dakshinamurti, 103
Dasaratha, 83
Dhritarashtra, 83
Dhruva, 86
Draupadi, 89
Gajendra, 86

Gopalakrishna Bharathi, 94
Guruvayoor, 60
indra, 88
Jabali, 82
Jayadeva, 221
Kabirdas, 61
Kaikeyi, 83
Kamban, 137, 191
Kanaka SabhA, 92
Kannappar, 85
King Raja-Raja I, 93
Kuresa, 86
Lakshmi, 90
Madhva, 61
Malik-Kafur, 93
Manikkavachagar, 355
Meerabai, 61
muyalakan, 91
Nambi Aroorar, 353
Nambi-Andar-Nambi, 93
Nandanar, 94
Narada, 87
Nataraja, 90
Nayanmars, 94
NilakanTha, 236
Nritta SabhA, 92
Patanjali, 90
Prahlada, 83
Raghavendra, 61
Ramakrishna, 61, 104
Ramanuja, 61
Ramanujacharya, 86
RAvaNa, 88
Robert Oppenheimer, 149
Sambandar, 94
Sanatkumara, 83
Sathya Sai Baba, 104
Sekkizhar, 92
Shankara, 54, 61, 85
Shukra-acharya, 191
Sisupala, 223
Sundarar, 94
Swami ChinmayAnanda, 106
Tillai, 89
Tirumangai-AlvAr, 88
Tirunavukkarasar, 61
Tiruvarur, 93
Vallalar, 61
Vasishta, 82
Vedanta Desika, 61
Venkatesa AyyavaL, 387
vibhISaNa, 88
Vibhishana, 86
Virupaksha, 93
Vishnu, 87
Visvakarma, 93
Visvamitra, 82
Visvanatha Sastri, 387
VyAgrapAda, 90
Adi Shankara, 213
Adisesha, 90
Ahalya, 86
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 92
Apastambha, 121
Appar, 93
Appayya Dikshidar, 62, 377
Arundhati, 128
Bhartrhari, 136
Brahma, 57
BrahmA, 89
Buddha, 86
Chaitanya, 62
Chit-sabhA, 92
Dakshinamurti, 102
Dasaratha, 83
Dhritarashtra, 83
Dhruva, 86
Draupadi, 89
Gajendra, 86
Gopalakrishna Bharathi, 94
Guruvayoor, 61
indra, 88
Jabali, 83
Kabirdas, 62
Kaikeyi, 83
Kamban, 139
Kanaka SabhA, 92
Kannappar, 85
King Raja-Raja I, 93
Kuresa, 86
Lakshmi, 90
Madhva, 62
Malik-Kafur, 93
Manikkavachagar, 345
Meerabai, 62
muyalakan, 91
Nambi Aroorar, 344
Nambi-Andar-Nambi, 93
Nandanar, 94
Narada, 87
Nataraja, 90
Nayanmars, 94
NilakanTha, 237
Nritta SabhA, 92
Patanjali, 90
Prahlada, 84
Raghavendra, 62
Ramakrishna, 62, 103
Ramanuja, 62
Ramanujacharya, 86
RAvaNa, 88
Robert Oppenheimer, 151

Sambandar, 93
Sanatkumara, 83
Sathya Sai Baba, 103
Sekkizhar, 92
Shankara, 55, 62, 86
Sundarar, 93
Swami ChinmayAnanda, 105
Tillai, 89
Tirumangai-AlvAr, 88
Tirunavukkarasar, 62
Tiruvarur, 93
Vallalar, 62
Vasishta, 82
Vedanta Desika, 62
Venkatesa AyyavaL, 377
vibhISaNa, 88
Vibhishana, 86
Virupaksha, 93
Vishnu, 87
Visvakarma, 92
Visvamitra, 82
Visvanatha Sastri, 378
VyAgrapAda, 90